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Contemporary
Historical
Examination of
Current
Operations
REPORT

AIR SUPPORT IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE (U)

25 FEBRUARY 1970

HQ PACAF
Directorate, Tactical Evaluation
CHECO Division

Prepared by:

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14. ABSTRACT Project CHECO was established in 1962 to document and analyze air operations in Southeast Asia. Over the years the meaning of the acronym changed several times to reflect the escalation of operations: Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations, Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Combat Operations and Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations. Project CHECO and other U. S. Air Force Historical study programs provided the Air Force with timely and lasting corporate insights into operational, conceptual and doctrinal lessons from the war in SEA.				
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The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in the employment of USAF airpower to meet a multitude of requirements. The varied applications of airpower have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, there has been an accumulation of operational data and experiences that, as a priority, must be collected, documented, and analyzed as to current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity that would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction, and would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet this Air Staff requirement. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements at Hq 7AF and 7AF/13AF, Project CHECO provides a scholarly, "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. Along with the other CHECO publications, this is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM.



MILTON B. ADAMS, Major General, USAF
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FOREWORD

Quang Ngai Province was one of the strongest Viet Cong areas in South Vietnam. Continuous from 1965, the NVA/VC advanced stiff resistance to friendly efforts to gain control of the population. Air support played an integral part in ground operations against the enemy.

Previous CHECO reports often emphasized how air support operated from the Air Force point of view. The purpose of this study is to examine air support from the point of view of the man looking up, to investigate how commanders employed air to support ground operations, to establish its place in the overall tactical situation, and to measure, as far as possible, how air support affected the enemy's ability to operate in Quang Ngai Province.

The first chapter outlines the historical setting for air support of friendly ground operations against the enemy. The request systems for obtaining air support are explained in the second chapter, and the final chapter places in context the tactical employment of airpower, the effect of immediate airstrikes, and the often misunderstood impact of preplanned airstrikes on the operational capability of the enemy.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Early History

Viewed from twenty thousand feet, Quang Ngai, the southernmost province in I Corps, fits neatly into the general pattern of the coastal provinces. The coastal lowlands push inland from the South China Sea against the foothills about seventeen miles along the Song Tra Bong River in the north and recede gradually back to the ocean near the southern boundary.

The foothills rise rapidly to meet the rugged, mountainous jungles which cover three-fourths of the province area of 5,637 square kilometers. Three main rivers weave through the numerous steep valleys of the Troung Son Mountain chain in their easterly flow to the coast. Sheer cliffs and steep slopes rise from the valleys to form a myriad of ridgelines and peaks, rising generally to heights from 900 to 1,600 feet with some reaching 6,000 feet on the western border. This mountainous area is covered with dense underbrush of grass, vines, briars, and thick forests reaching more than 160 feet into the air, forming unlimited opportunities for enemy movement and concealment.

The highlands of Quang Ngai have harbored Montagnard tribesmen since their ancestors migrated from Kontum and Laos sometime prior to the fifteenth century. Still following the patterns set centuries ago, these primitive people existed by burning away patches of the forest, cultivating the cleared land until the crops exhausted the soil, and then moving

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on to another location. In 1969, they formed about one-sixth of the population of the province.

About the same time that the Montagnards moved into the highlands, dissident elements from the Nguyen dynasty left their homes near Hanoi to settle along the coastal lowlands. They established a rural economy by planting rice in the flatlands and cultivating manioc, maize, corn, peas, and assorted fruits upon the not too generous portions of arable soil between the sandy coast and foothills. Many turned to fishing in the South China Sea, lumbering in the mountains, and concentrating on homecrafts.

The area became well known for silk and for mats woven of reeds that grew along the river banks. Although the peasants harvested rice twice a year, in March and October, their crops suffered great losses each year from flooding. Rooted to the soil for their very existence, the vast majority of the people knew little but work from dawn to sunset, interrupted only by the few holidays of the lunar calendar.

Poor, but proud and aggressive, the people of Quang Ngai Province historically exhibited the rebellious nature which eventually turned the province into a bastion of revolutionary activity. When the French extended their influence into Vietnam in the late nineteenth century, the strongest armed resistance centered in the provinces of Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh; and from these provinces, in the 1930s, the first peasant revolts broke out against the Vietnamese officials who supported the French.

Bombing Near Hamlets
FIGURE 1



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The Japanese forced the Viet Minh troops into the highlands during World War II, but following the Allied victory, Viet Minh soldiers marched triumphantly into Quang Ngai and were welcomed by the people as their liberators. French troops never succeeded in reentering the province in force.

During the revolutionary campaign that eventually expelled the French from Vietnam, all Viet Minh nerve-center military installations in Military Region 5 were located in the province, with the headquarters located in Quang Ngai City itself. Ho Chi Minh looked upon Quang Ngai as a zone already freed from the French and the Emperor Bao Dai. The town of Duc Pho, with its beautiful beaches and fiery women, became one of the largest rest centers in the country for Viet Minh soldiers.

In 1954, when many of the Viet Minh soldiers and political organizations were moved to the north, about 30,400 party members, 16,000 families, and 1,200 political and military cadres stayed behind to insure that Saigon control did not extend beyond the larger towns.

By 1960, a whole generation of young people in the rural areas had known no government other than the Viet Minh and National Liberation Front. The province had also produced several key Communist officials, including the Prime Minister of North Vietnam (NVN), Pham Van Dong, and four North Vietnamese Army (NVA) generals.
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Outbreak of Viet Cong Attacks, 1960

The year 1960 marked the real beginning of the struggle that soon engulfed Quang Ngai Province in seemingly endless waves of death and destruction. In that year, the Viet Cong (VC) (the new appellation for the late Viet Minh party) launched a series of assassinations and attacks against the Nationalist leaders.

The campaign broke out on the night of 10 October 1960, with the assassination of the Ba To District Chief, and continued over the next two months with the death of seven other victims, including village representatives, hamlet chiefs, and anticomunist elements.

In addition, a Viet Cong battalion ambushed a convoy led by the Deputy Province Chief in charge of internal security, killing the chief and a number of the cadre and burning their vehicles. They also launched a battalion-sized force against an army battalion at An Hoa post.

The Nationalist leaders petitioned the central government for aid and set about organizing popular forces, training paramilitary units, and setting up agrovilles and combat hamlets to cope with the Viet Cong guerrillas.

Despite these efforts, more Viet Cong cadres returned from NVN to swell the Communist ranks, and guerrilla forces continued to extend their control over the rural areas by burning government offices, schools, markets, and villages. The government popular forces, scattered and armed with out-of-date weapons, could not contain the Viet Cong attacks which soon expanded from guerrilla to mobile warfare. By the beginning of 1962, the Viet Cong

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controlled most of the province, limiting government control to a few
4/
towns.

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, in May 1962, Ngo Dinh Diem launched the Strategic Hamlet Program with particular vigor in Quang Ngai Province. The program's aim was to separate the people from the Viet Cong soldiers and organizers who lived among them.

With newly trained and modernized regular and popular forces, government leaders urged the people in contested areas to leave their villages and help construct fortifications and new homes in strategically located hamlets. If a family refused to move, the regular troops were empowered to burn its home and fields.

While this program met with some outward indications of success, the Viet Cong influence remained high even within the framework of the strategic hamlets. They continued to attack isolated outposts, burned offices, schools, and hospitals, and attempted to destroy all community development programs. Incidents of kidnapping and assassination increased, with bills of indictment to damage the prestige of government personnel. Reinforced by cadres and soldiers returning from North Vietnam, the Viet Cong built up their various organs, sent youths to secret zones for training and arms, dug secret tunnels for local cadre and guerrillas, and forced the people to support them with supplies and money. Guerrilla units operated from one district to another following mobile warfare tactics. For the first time, they launched large-scale offensives in an attempt to break up the

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hamlet building program.

In August 1962, four Viet Cong companies broke into Vinh Loc hamlet, Son Tinh District, with artillery and machine guns. The battle lasted a day and a night causing heavy casualties to the Regional Force company and armed youths defending the hamlet. In May 1963, the Viet Cong concentrated two battalions in Mo Duc District and occupied several villages for two days. Before being driven out, they destroyed a number of strategic hamlets in the region.

Despite the continual harassment, the government program had extended measured control over some of the more populated parts of the province by the middle of 1963. But in doing so, the policies of Diem created deep-seated hostilities in Quang Ngai, as well as in Saigon and other parts of the country.
^{5/}

The Buddhist struggle to counter Diem's government entered a crucial phase in the fall of 1963 and culminated in the military coup of 1 November 1963, when the Armed Forces overthrew President Ngo Dinh Diem. Under orders of the Central Military Revolutionary Council, on 7 November the Commander of the 25th Division, Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), took over the Quang Ngai Province government.

In the political and military upheavals that followed the denunciation of the old government and implementation of the new, the Strategic Hamlet Program was dropped and all coordinated efforts to repulse the Viet Cong ceased. The Viet Cong used this opportunity to infiltrate the newly formed government from province to village and hamlet levels.

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Fortified Headquarters
FIGURE 2

Viet Cong cadres induced many of the Self-Defense Corps and Combat Youth Platoons to defect to the communist side, bringing along all their weapons. They used the lull to proselyte, train, and equip three new Province Mobile Battalions composed of infiltrated North Vietnam soldiers, regrouping National Guardsmen and selected guerrilla men. In every district, the Viet Cong maintained one to three companies of full-time forces, strengthened the village guerrillas, and trained and equipped local youths on the spot, creating a military command system from the province down to the villages.

Meanwhile, party disputes, religious resentment between Catholics and Buddhists, and the disruptive activities of an organization called the People's Salvation Council, all combined to stifle the new administrators' efforts and to reinforce the Viet Cong's influence throughout the province. ^{6/}

The practically unhindered preparations of the NVA/VC culminated in May 1965, when they launched an NVA reinforced, regimental-sized attack against the 51st ARVN Regiment near Ba Gia outpost. Located about 12 miles northwest of Quang Ngai City, Ba Gia was the westernmost post guarding against enemy infiltration down the Song Pra Khuc River valley.

As the battle gained momentum, both the NVA/VC and Republic of Vietnam (RVN) sent in reinforcements. By the sixth day, the enemy had pushed the battle to the very outskirts of the capital city. Increasing waves of airstrikes took their toll and on the ninth day forced the NVA/VC to withdraw to the mountains. The enemy failed to capture and hold Ba Gia

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but succeeded in destroying the 51st ARVN Regiment.

Airpower proved to be the decisive influence in the first large battle fought for control of Quang Ngai Province. Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) and Free World Air Force (FWAF) aircraft flew 651 strike sorties and 15 night flare sorties. They dropped 2,283 flares and 754.3 tons of bombs and napalm, reporting 1,430 structures destroyed and 423 damaged in the action. The attack on Ba Gia startled Saigon and the local military commanders. It marked the beginning of a new phase of warfare for control of the province. ^{7/}

Entry of Free World Forces, 1965

Left to their own resources, the RVN forces would have been unable to save Quang Ngai Province from absolute control by the Viet Cong. Fortunately, assistance was already on its way. As Allied ground forces and increased air support moved into the province, government regular, regional, and popular forces were able to regroup and expand. From the questionable capability of being able to defend the capital itself, the combined forces slowly extended operations throughout the populated regions of the coastal plains and into the infiltration routes along the mountain slopes.

The III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF) landed its first elements at Chu Lai, on the coast just beyond the northern province border, on 7 May 1965, and constructed a short tactical airstrip by the end of the month. ^{8/} In August, three Marine battalions swept along the Binh Son District coast to thwart an incipient attack by the Viet Cong 1st Regiment on Chu Lai. The Marines killed approximately 700 VC in their first victory on Quang Ngai

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soil. In September 1965, they conducted a successful search and destroy operation on the Batangan Peninsula, and in November joined with the South Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC) and the Army of Republic of Vietnam forces to relieve the beleaguered Thach Tru Ranger outpost near the highway in southern Mo Duc District.

In early 1966, military forces moved from defensive to offensive operations. Strengthened by the arrival of the 2d ARVN Division in April 1966, and a Republic of Korea (ROK) Marine Brigade in August, the military expanded operations all along the coastal districts of the province.

The III MAF initiated COUNTRY FAIR operations in April and joined with the 2d ARVN Division to secure the rice harvest in Mo Duc in September 1966. Behind this increasing security, the Revolutionary Development Program (RDP) slowly expanded and received a significant boost with the arrival and placement of 16 Vung Tau-trained 59-man cadres in October 1966.

10/

Americal Division Arrives, 1967

The military posture received renewed strength in 1967 when the over-extended III MAF force was replaced by two brigades of the Americal Division (designated Task Force Oregon until September) which moved in with headquarters at Chu Lai in April. One brigade operated to the north of the Song Tra Khuc River and the other to the south out of Duc Pho. In June, for the first time in more than two years, a convoy traveled the entire distance from Chu Lai to Duc Pho on National Highway I.

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ARVN, Americal, Regional Force (RF), Popular Force (PF), and Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) forces cooperated with the Province Chief in operations designed to extend security and encourage inhabitants of contested areas to move into government controlled hamlets and refugee camps. Combined military forces moved through the river valleys leading from the mountains and other contested areas such as the Batangan Peninsula.

In addition to combating the NVA/VC and destroying their base camps, they evacuated the people to refugee centers and then burned all of the structures to deny their use to the enemy and to discourage the refugees from returning to their homes.^{11/} By November 1967, there were 116,214 refugees scattered in secure areas and 61,507 refugees located in 66 temporary camps and 19 permanent camps.

Although these extensive operations kept the NVA/VC from launching any major attacks, they continually harassed the countryside; the number of incidents ranged from 178 in March to a low of 39 in November. In December 1967, the enemy overran and almost destroyed Binh Son District Headquarters. Intelligence indicated the enemy reoccupied base areas within 48 hours after friendly troops moved through.^{12/}

The province report for December 1967 concluded that although the 1967 hamlet construction program was accomplished in theory, it had "failed in fact, because the rural areas remain vulnerable at any time to Viet Cong intimidation and attack."^{13/}



FAC Aircraft 0-2, OV-10, O-1
FIGURE 3

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NVA/VC Offensive, Tet 1968

The enemy broke loose in the Tet Offensive of January and February 1968. The offensive began on 2 January, with an attack on Nghia Hanh District Headquarters, followed by 71 separate incidents and an all-out effort on 31 January to occupy Quang Ngai City with an estimated 3,500 troops.

Enemy forces succeeded in occupying the Provincial Prison (releasing 600 PWs), RF/PF Training Center, and a Catholic school, including three adjacent blocks. The enemy was driven out of the city on 2 February 1968. Fighting continued until 6 February, when a second attack on the city was successfully repulsed and the enemy withdrew following a relentless bombardment by air. Harassment continued with 91 additional incidents in February and dropped off in March to 61.

The attacks resulted in almost total collapse of security throughout the province, except in Duc Pho, and left many Vietnamese officials confused and frightened. This situation proved to be temporary and by March 1968, conditions were approaching normal with 40 of the 48 Revolutionary Development Teams back in their assigned hamlets. Military forces returned to offensive search and clear operations throughout the rest of the year and the enemy avoided major contacts, except for an abortive battalion probe against the capital in August 1968.

Increased security came to the Revolutionary Development Program in

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November 1968, when the ARVN forces accepted the task of directly or indirectly supporting the program, and ARVN/America troops began cordon and search operations in conjunction with the PHOENIX/PHUNG HOANG plan designed to eliminate the Viet Cong infrastructure.

Viet Cong incidents dropped from 103 in August to 55 in December 1968. They followed the same general harassment pattern of terrorist attacks, murders, interdiction of lines of communications by mining and sniping, and burning of homes. In an attack on the Son Tra refugee camp, they destroyed 70 percent of the homes by burning, leaving 2,800 of the 4,600 population homeless.
^{14/}

Renewed Enemy Offensive, 1969

Despite their inability to capture and hold any of the government areas, and the large losses sustained in every major encounter, the enemy continued to build up their forces at an estimated rate of 600 infiltrators a month. In February 1969, the province report estimated an enemy strength of two NVA regiments, one main force Viet Cong regiment, about 2,000 local force VC, and 6,000 guerrillas.

The NVA/VC leaders unleashed these forces in an unprecedented number of attacks during the Tet Offensive that year. In the first month after the outbreak on 23 February 1969, they launched 236 separate incidents throughout the province. The attacks continued and by the end of August totaled 878 compared with 621 for the same period in 1968.

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Friendly units countered these attacks with offensive operations heavily supported by air. The Regional and Popular Forces troops exhibited an integrity unknown the year before and refused to withdraw, in spite of numerous encounters. The 2d ARVN Division thwarted two attempts to capture Quang Ngai City before they were launched.

Reacting to intelligence that the 22d NVA Regiment was moving into the area southwest of the capital, two ARVN regiments closed upon the enemy on 24 February. They encountered stiff resistance from the NVA troops who were in fortified positions, including concrete bunkers, in the hamlets and tree lines scattered over the cultivated landscape. Almost continuous artillery and 336 fighter aircraft pounded the enemy positions before they had been driven back to the mountains, following 14 days of fighting.

Although the NVA lost 568 KIA (339 KBA), reducing their effective strength to 300-350, within ten days infiltrators had swelled their ranks to approximately 1,300, and they were again reported in northern Nghia Hanh massing for an attack on the capital.

On 20 March 1969, ARVN/Americaical forces moved to close upon the enemy in a three-pronged attack. Again they found the NVA troops dug-in in the hamlets and tree lines and called upon artillery, helicopter-gunships, and airstrikes to dislodge them. After several fierce battles and 13 days of fighting, the enemy broke under the concentrated firepower and were once again driven into the mountains. Friendly ground forces and 90 fighters accounted for 489 enemy KIA (148 KBA).

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Unfortunately, these battles were fought in populated areas. The province report for March indicated that 306 civilians had been killed, 396 wounded, and 3,132 houses had been 50-100 percent destroyed. The report estimated that 40 percent of the civilian casualties resulted from friendly fire, artillery, and airstrikes. ^{15/}

As 1969 drew to a close, notwithstanding the unprecedented pressures from enemy harassment, the government forces and their American Allies looked with satisfaction upon the past year. They had maintained their offensive posture and had decidedly crushed the enemy in every major engagement.

The Revolutionary Development Program marked the following achievements: relatively secure hamlets up from 147 to 303; contested hamlets down from 137 to 19; Viet Cong controlled hamlets down from 238 to 40; total hamlets down from 522 to 362. Population figures indicated the following: relatively secure up from 62.9 percent to 90.9 percent; contested down from 16.3 percent to 3.3 percent; Viet Cong controlled down from 20.8 percent to 5.8 percent; total population at 644,600. Revolutionary Development cadres had increased from 54 to 108.

However, there were still problems to be faced in 1970. The 115,398 refugees had to be returned to their homes. An estimated Viet Cong infrastructure was still at 2,489, as compared with 3,000 at the beginning of the year, and the enemy's strength was estimated at 5,940 maneuver, 2,325 combat and support, 1,230 administrative services, and 3,232 guerrillas,

resulting in a total force of 12,727.

Military Posture, 1970

The primary mission of the military forces in Quang Ngai Province was to provide security to the populated areas, so that the pacification and development programs might rout out the Viet Cong infrastructure and win the people to the side of the government. Military success depended upon effective deployment of the 2d ARVN Division and Free World Force units together with the Regional, Popular, and CIDG forces.

From 1965 through 1967, the main responsibility had rested upon the Free World forces. Although they successfully thwarted large enemy attacks, the NVA/VC harassed the population quite freely behind their backs. This situation improved considerably and brought a measure of security to larger areas of the population as the government recruited, trained, and equipped more troops. It also improved as Vietnamese commanders gained experience and confidence in their own abilities.

Progress accelerated in 1968, and by the end of 1969, the military posture in the province formed a well-integrated network of defense. From the lone 51st ARVN Regiment, which formed the first line of defense at the outbreak of the battle of Ba Gia outpost, the forces had expanded to include two Americal brigades, two ARVN regiments, 50 Regional Force (RF) companies, 257 Popular Force (PF) platoons, and five Special Forces Camps. To aid village defense, an additional 61,935 Peoples Self Defense Forces (PSDF) had been trained, and of these, 9,922 were armed. Additionally, the

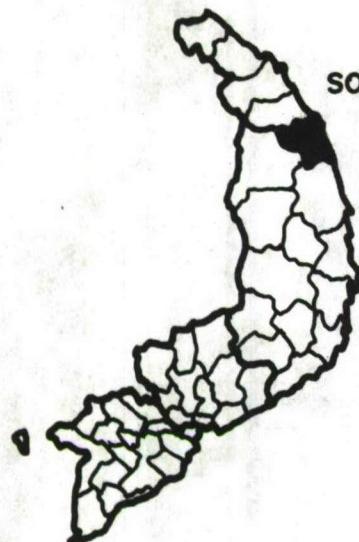
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province had 1,199 assigned National Police.

Government officials had divided the province into two large tactical areas of responsibility (TAOR), with the Song Tra Khuc River roughly forming the dividing line (Fig. 4). The ARVN 6th Regiment and the Americal 198th Brigade shared the TAOR to the north, while the ARVN 4th Regiment and the Americal 11th Brigade shared the one to the south. The Special Forces Camps and RF/PF units were assigned special areas of operation (AO) within the TAORs.

Five Special Forces Camps formed the front line of defense in the province (Fig. 4). Ground units seldom operated to the west of the Special Forces Camp AOs and referred to the area as "Indian Country." The camps, starting at the north, were Tra Bong, Ha Thanh, Minh Long, Ba To, and Gia Vuc. Each camp had an authorized strength of 556 Civilian Irregular Defense Group forces, composed of about 60 percent Montagnard and 40 percent Vietnamese troops. Each camp, except Gia Vuc, operated under the direction of a 12-man Vietnamese Special Forces Team advised by a 14-man U.S. Special Forces Team. Gia Vuc had no U.S. Advisors.

Each camp's mission was to protect the civilian populace near their camp and to interdict NVA/VC troop and supply movements in their AO. Their forces were organized into three CIDG Companies of three platoons each (43 men), three Combat Reconnaissance Platoons (34 men), one Political Warfare Team (16 men), and one Heavy Weapons Section (16 men). CIDG units conducted reconnaissance-in-force and ambush operations designed to cover their AO

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SOUTH VIETNAM

QUANG NGAI

SPECIAL FORCES CAMP AOs

198 BDE / 6 REG AOs

1

11 BDE / 4 REG AOs

QUANG TIN

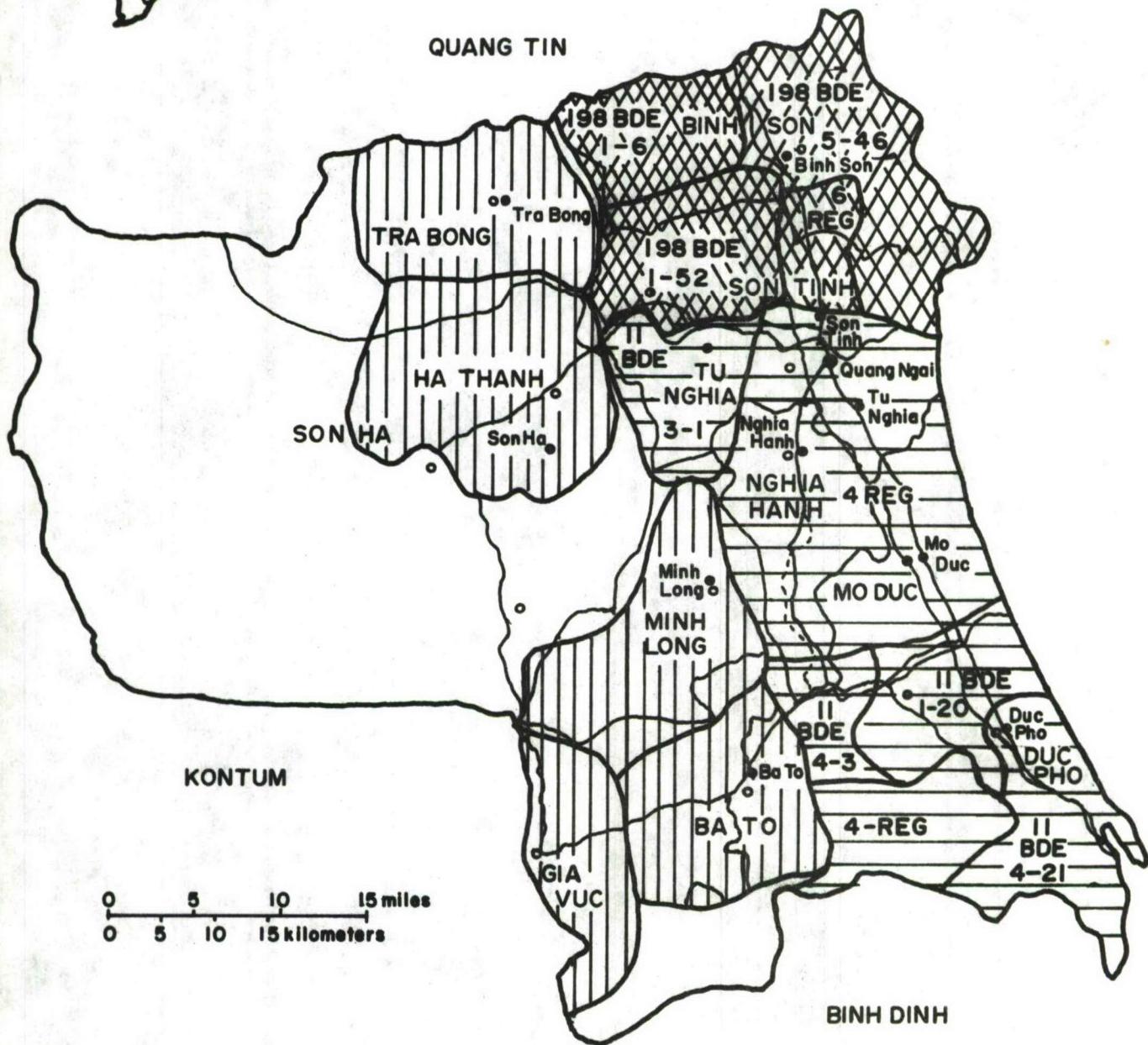


FIGURE 4

1990-1991

every 30 days. The soldiers traveled light and moved more rapidly through the rugged mountainous terrain than the regular army units. Rather than dig in at night, they set up ambushes and hid in the dense jungle foliage. Whenever units ran into large enemy forces, they depended heavily upon air support to bail them out.

Although they had occasionally conducted missions in the Special Forces Camp AOs, the ARVN/Americal elements primarily restricted their operations within the TAORs to the east. They provided security for the populated areas by conducting reconnaissance-in-force and ambush operations to interdict NVA/VC infiltration and counter large-scale attacks. Units conducted rice-denial operations during harvest time and assisted the PHOENIX/PHUNG HOANG program by forming cordons around villages, while the RF/PF and police forces searched out the Viet Cong infrastructure.

As Figure 4 reflects, the ARVN regiments and the Americal battalions were each assigned specific AOs within the TAORs. In addition to providing security for their assigned AO, each unit provided forces to participate in reconnaissance-in-force operations conducted throughout the TAOR or to react to enemy attacks. The ARVN commanders were taking over more responsibility for offensive operations, while the Americal units turned more to security. These operations largely took place along the infiltration routes leading out of the mountains and into the Viet Cong-infested areas of the coast.

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RF/PF and PSDF forces had the responsibility for day-to-day security against attacks in the districts. They formed the essential last line of defense. Until these forces had been recruited, trained, and enlarged, the NVA/VC retained the ability to move in behind the regular troops and attack the populace at will. These units were under control of the Province Chief and were commanded by the Deputy Province Chief for Military Affairs. Fifty RF companies (134 men each), 257 platoons (37 men each), and 61,935 PSDF forces were assigned throughout the ten districts in the province. The RF companies were mobile units organized into eight group headquarters which could be assigned anywhere in the province. The PF platoons and PSDF forces operated within their own district and normally near their home village. They were responsible to the District, Village, and Hamlet Chiefs.

Territorial security within the districts was based upon the use of forces within three designated areas. The "sweeping-up area" was territory primarily controlled by the Viet Cong. Units of one RF company and about ten PF platoons conducted combat sweeps and ambushes in this area to aid the Regular Forces in interdicting enemy infiltration and attacks. The second area was contested territory where efforts were being made to improve control. RF companies had primary responsibility and with the support of ARVN, PF, National Police, and PSDF, conducted operations to interdict infiltration, prevent attacks, discover weapons caches, and destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure. The third area was labeled the "safe area." It included all government controlled territory. The PF, PSDF, and National Police, supported by the RF, maintained security in this area by

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protecting the key installations, lines of communications, bridges, villages, and hamlets.

The RF/PF commanders usually left the selection of targets for pre-planned airstrikes to the ARVN. If they did identify a target, which happened infrequently, they submitted the request through district and province channels to the 2d ARVN Division's Tactical Operations Center (TOC) to be processed with other requests from the division. Because their operations were normally limited to small unit engagements, they did not require many immediate airstrikes. When they did require air support, they passed their request through district and province channels to the 2d ARVN Division TOC, and it was processed through the normal request net. These requests were usually for Air Force gunship support to thwart night attacks on the hamlets and villages.

19/

Vietnamization

An intensified "Vietnamization" of the war effort was launched in the summer of 1969. July saw the inauguration of a weekly meeting chaired by the CG, 2d ARVN Division, with the CG, Americal Division, Quang Ngai and Quang Tin Province Chiefs, and their Advisors in attendance. Their objective was to prepare the government forces to completely take over the war effort.

The meetings brought about a proliferation of joint Americal and ARVN operations, with the ARVN units taking more responsibility in conducting reconnaissance-in-force campaigns. They brought closer cooperation in

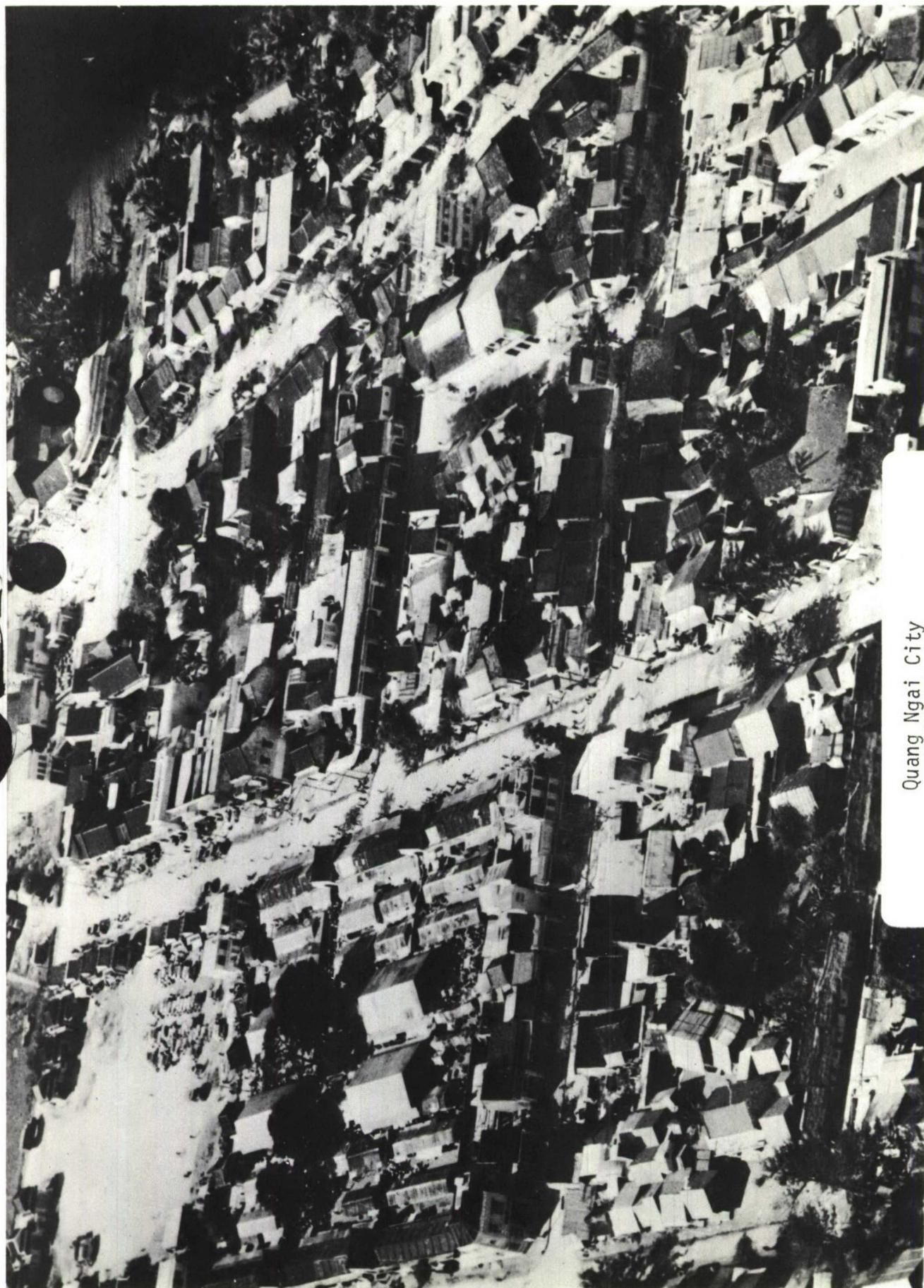
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conducting cordon and search operations in support of the PHOENIX/PHUNG HOANG program aimed at eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure.

In October 1969, the Infantry Company Intensive Pacification Program was launched with the mission of training Vietnamese troops. One Americal company, one ARVN company, two Regional Force companies, and four Popular Force platoons were assigned to an AO. The Americal company assigned one squad to live and operate with each of the government units. Initial reports indicated that the Vietnamese morale and effectiveness had increased greatly. In addition, the increased security had encouraged village and hamlet chiefs, RD teams, and PSDF forces to live in the villages and hamlets rather than just visit them in the daytime. The people were also more inclined to give timely intelligence on Viet Cong locations and movements.

As 1970 opened, a primary goal was to move ahead along the successful lines of "Vietnamization."
20/

Quang Ngai City
FIGURE 5



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CHAPTER II TACTICAL AIR REQUEST SYSTEM

Starting with the decisive support rendered during the battle for control of Ba Gia outpost in May 1965, tactical air support played an integral role in the effort to thwart NVA/VC attacks in Quang Ngai Province.

Prior to March 1968, USAF/VNAF fighter support was controlled by the I Corps Direct Air Support Center (DASC), and U.S. Marine fighter support was controlled by the III Marine Air Wing's Tactical Air Direction Center (TADC). In August 1968, under the Single Manager concept, the newly constructed Horn DASC assumed control of all Free World tactical air support, while I DASC retained control of VNAF resources.

The changes and modifications that took place through the years steadily improved the request and control system. By January 1970, it was effective and highly responsive to ground commanders' needs. At this time, the Americal Division, 2d ARVN Division, Special Forces Camps, and RF/PF each employed similar systems to request and control the tactical air support supplied through Horn and I DASCs.
^{1/}

Preplanned Requests

The battalions, districts, and camps were the levels where most target requests originated, although additional requests could be added by higher headquarters. The S-3 Air at these levels used all intelligence at his

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disposal to select the most appropriate targets for FAC-directed, COMBAT SKYSPOT, and ARC LIGHT airstrikes.

These requests were numbered in order of priority and submitted at about 0830 hours daily to higher headquarters for airstrikes to be flown the following day and night. The order of priority guidelines were: landing zone and objective preps, combat air patrol, confirmed enemy locations, landing zone construction, reported enemy locations, suspected enemy locations, and infiltration routes. These requests were consolidated and numbered in order of priority at each level of the chain of command (Fig. 6). Battalions, districts, and camps obtained military and political clearance for each target before forwarding their requests, and the higher ^{2/} headquarters confirmed the clearances.

In May 1968, in conjunction with implementation of the Single Manager System, the request system was greatly simplified. At that time, Seventh Air Force's Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) started fragging approximately 70 percent of all preplanned airstrikes on a weekly warning order. This was done to eliminate the unnecessary repetition of processing the great volume of data through the request system each day and assured the ground commanders a specific allocation of air.

With this change, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) Tactical Air Support Element (TASE) eliminated the requirement to submit encoded coordinates and target descriptions with each request. They now only required a desired time over target (TOT), desired ordnance, and

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PREPLANNED REQUEST NET

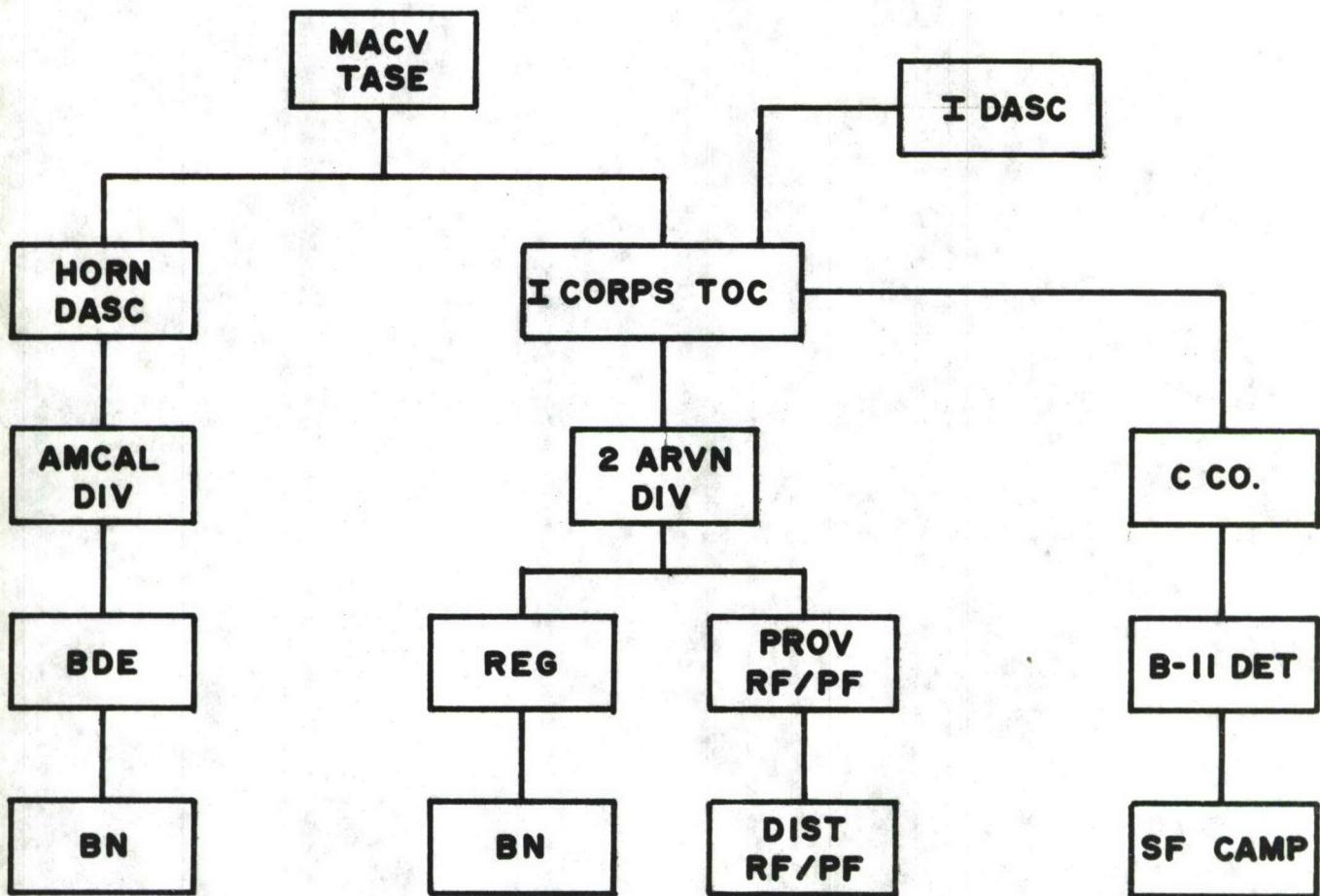


FIGURE 6

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rendezvous. They also simplified the rendezvous by having each Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) establish one standard rendezvous for all targets in their AO.

Since publication of the first weekly warning order, each ground commander knew that he would have a certain number of airstrikes at specified TOTs to use as he saw fit each day. These remained constant unless changed in either of two ways. Each weekly frag could add or subtract from the number of airstrikes, or the ground commander could request a change in TOT or ordnance on a daily basis. In addition, the ground commander could obtain approximately 30 percent more airstrikes by submitting requests on a daily basis. Retaining 30 percent of the airstrikes to be fragged on a daily basis allowed MACV TASE to reallocate its resources to meet daily changes in the location and level of enemy activity.

In Quang Ngai Province, the Americal Division, 2d ARVN Division, and "C" Company continued to require their subordinate units to submit all target requests on a daily basis. They then assigned the airstrikes allocated on the weekly frag order to the highest priority targets, forwarded a portion for the daily frag order, and retained the rest for possible diverts. This procedure gave them the flexibility to reallocate their airstrikes to meet daily changes within their TAOR.

The separation of Horn DASC and I DASC brought a significant change, because the Vietnamese units were required to use the VNAF 41st Wing resources at Da Nang before requesting Free World air support, although

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they still received a specified number of airstrikes on the weekly
3/
warning order.

Immediate Requests

The immediate air request net worked smoothly and efficiently in the Americal Division. Requests for airstrikes could be initiated at company, battalion, or brigade level either through the army radio network or through a Helix FAC (Fig. 7).

The ground unit commander usually had blanket political clearance and controlled military clearance within his AO. If political clearance had not been granted in advance, it could be obtained through the battalion or brigade Fire Direct Control Center (FDCC). The brigade FDCC obtained military clearance from adjoining units, when necessary, and confirmed political clearances.

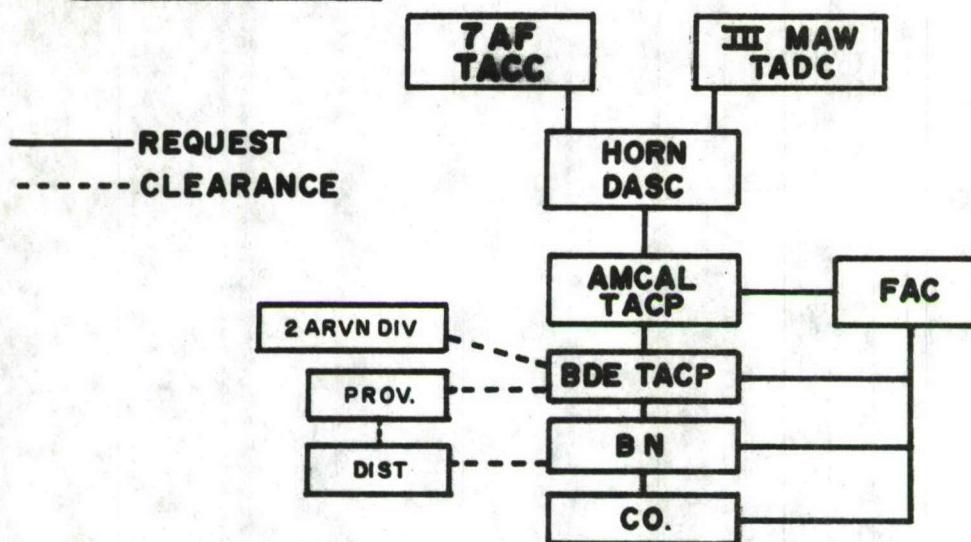
Horn DASC either diverted fighters already airborne or passed the request to III MAW's TADC or 7AF's TACC for a scramble from the alert pad. Diverts could arrive in less than ten minutes, while scrambles averaged
4/
about thirty minutes.

The ARVN, Special Forces Camps, and RF/PF immediate request nets involved a more complicated procedure which required that all requests be verified by a Free World Advisor. In effect, these units operated as a dual request system. Military and political clearances were obtained and confirmed as indicated in Figure 7.

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IMMEDIATE REQUEST NET

AMERICAL DIVISION



RF/PF
SF CAMPS
2 ARVN DIV

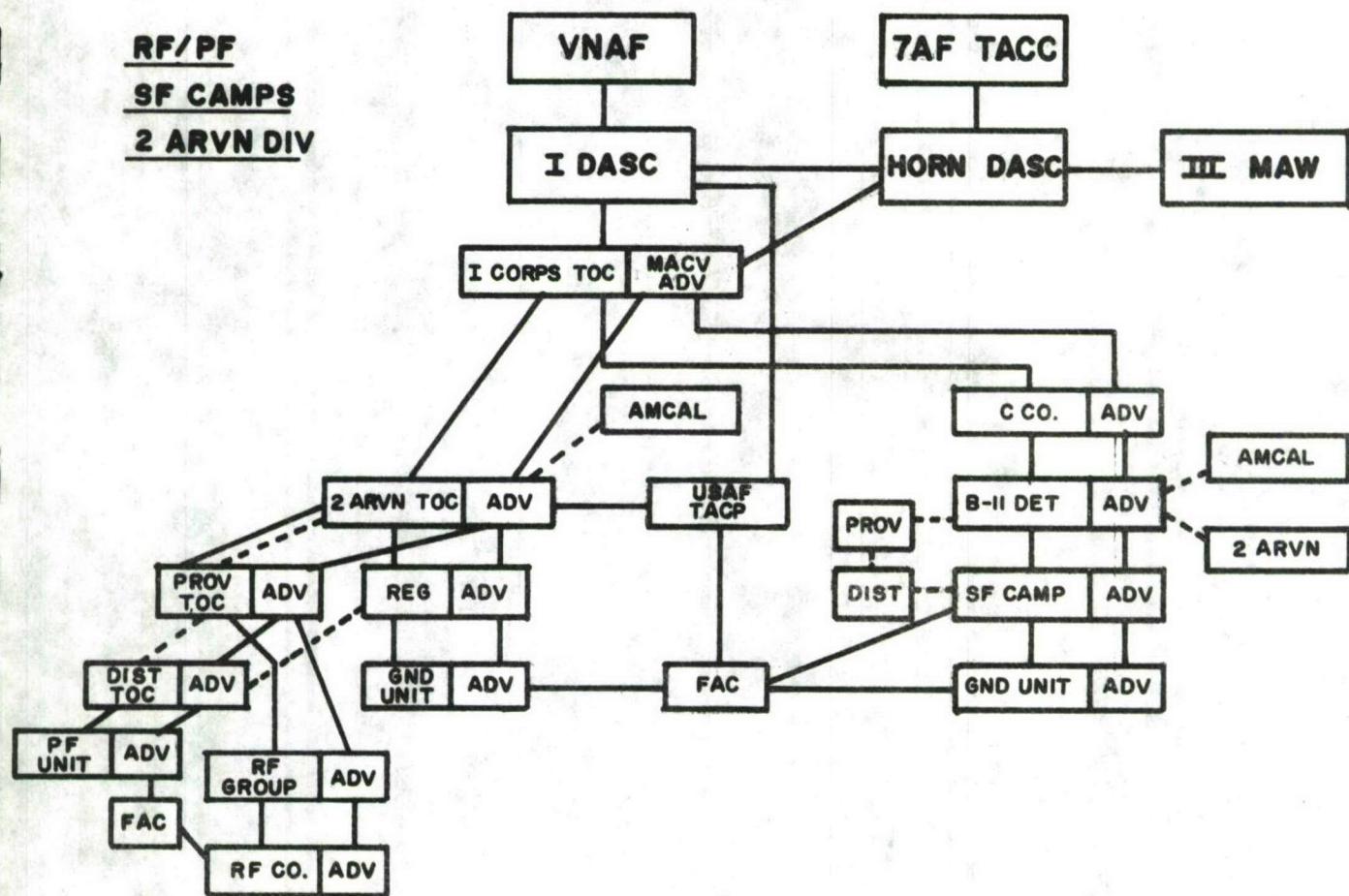


FIGURE 7

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Requests could not go forward from I DASC or Horn DASC until the MACV Advisor at I Corps TOC or the Special Forces Advisor had confirmed the request and clearances through the advisor net, and a FAC was available to put in the airstrike. Thus, requests had to proceed from the ground unit through the dual request chain of command before they could be honored.

At the same time as the request was passing up through the dual request net, the USAF TACP passed the information to I/Horn DASCs so they would be ready to act when the request arrived. The request went to I DASC first for VNAF support. If VNAF support were not available, I DASC passed the request to Horn DASC for Free World air support.

If VNAF fighters provided the support, a VNAF Forward Air Controller (FAC) would put in the airstrike. When available, the Special Forces ALO/FAC put in airstrikes in support of the Special Forces Camps. Despite its complicated appearance, the system worked quite smoothly and improved gradually as the Vietnamese gained experience.
5/

Vietnamization of the Request Systems

The creation of Horn DASC to control Free World air support in August 1968, although not intended for that purpose, laid the ground work to Vietnamize the control of air support for Vietnamese forces. Prior to that time, Free World advisors had borne the bulk of the responsibility. At that time, I DASC became a Vietnamese function with the responsibility of handling all Vietnamese requests for air support, and was required to utilize VNAF

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resources before calling upon Free World air. Initially, the advisors throughout the chain of command still did most of the work; however, conditions gradually improved.
6/

Vietnamization received emphasis in the summer of 1969 under the direction of Lt. Col. Edward Mendel, I Corps ARVN ALO, Maj. Tom J. Forster, "C" Company ALO for 5th Special Forces Group, and Lt. Col. Lowell F. Bohn, 2d ARVN Division ALO. Under Colonel Mendel's direction, ALOs and Advisors increased their efforts to train their Vietnamese counterparts to do their own work using their own system.

Advisors were merely to monitor the system for safety purposes. They aimed to accomplish four goals: (1) to establish a system that would continue to operate when the advisors and Free World units were withdrawn; (2) to expand the roles and missions the Vietnamese performed, so they could use the full range of tactical air capability; (3) to build a system so that decision points were Vietnamese, not Free World; and (4) to make the Vietnamese feel the need for improved VNAF air support by making them use their own resources before calling on Free World support.
7/

To accomplish these goals, the advisors implemented the dual request system and insisted that the Vietnamese process their own requests before receiving any air support. The Air Liaison Officers (ALOs) and advisors encouraged and educated their Vietnamese counterparts to use the full range of tactical air capability. As the Special Forces Camps were particularly uninformed, ALOs published a special pamphlet covering all aspects of the Tactical Air Support System and encouraged better application of air in

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support of Special Forces operations.

At 2d ARVN Division, the ALO/advisors had been nominating and processing most of the requests for preplanned airstrikes. To improve this situation, they formed a target committee with their ARVN counterparts and trained them to take over this responsibility. They also planned to collaborate and integrate the G-2 intelligence functions. By January 1970,
^{8/} significant progress had been made in all these areas.

Under direction of Seventh Air Force, Colonel Mendel implemented a program to upgrade VNAF FACs and Forward Air Observers (FAO) to control Free World airstrikes in support of Vietnamese operations.

Lt. John E. York arrived at Quang Ngai on 21 November 1969 to begin this program. He found that the VNAF FAC/FAOs failed to check friendly ground positions. They just marked the target and then moved out of the way while the fighters dropped their ordnance. Lieutenant York also discovered that if the target coordinates fell in the middle of a rice paddy, the VNAF FAC/FAO would mark the spot for an airstrike, without even looking for a logical target.

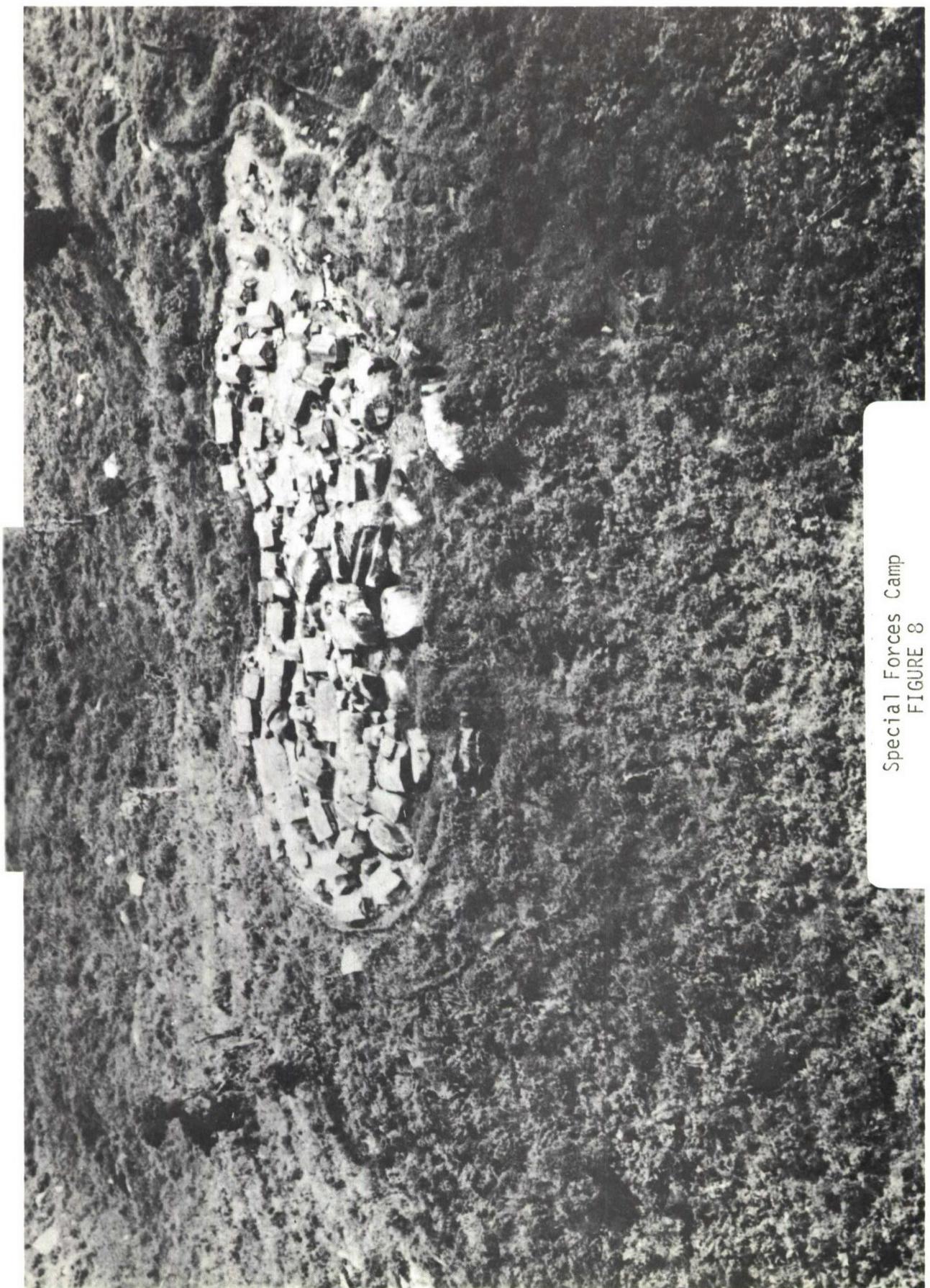
To certify the FAC/FAOs, Lieutenant York was required to teach them to be proficient in the following areas: (1) to have friendly ground units mark their positions before putting in an airstrike within 500 meters of their location; (2) to rendezvous the fighters with oral instructions; (3) to control the fighters by giving them run-in headings to avoid friendly positions and by clearing the fighters before every pass; (4) to properly

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identify the target if the coordinates were in error; (5) to adequately estimate BDA; and (6) to use proper visual reconnaissance procedures.

By 8 January 1970, Lieutenant York had certified one VNAF FAO after seven flights. He had also eliminated one VNAF FAC after ten flights,
9/ because the FAC's English was too poor to communicate effectively.



Special Forces Camp
FIGURE 8

CHAPTER III

TACTICAL EMPLOYMENT OF AIR SUPPORT

Forward Air Controllers

The FAC formed the integral link between the ARVN and Americal ground commanders and tactical air support. In addition to their threefold mission of visual reconnaissance, directing airstrikes, and advising the ground commanders, they performed numerous helpful functions in support of ground operations. These included adjusting artillery fire, giving directions to landing zones and water locations, warning friendlies of enemy positions, providing airborne cover for resupply convoy and medical evacuation (medevac) missions, flying the S-3 over the A0, search and rescue, and confirming suspected target locations. Without exception, all of the ground commanders interviewed expressed the highest praise for the excellent support rendered by the FAC operations. An intangible contribution frequently mentioned was the psychological impact upon the soldier in the field when he could hear or see the FAC circling overhead. The FAC's presence reassured him that no matter what size enemy force he might encounter, there was a preponderance of firepower available and ready to come to his aid.

The USAF TACP at Quang Ngai City, with the call sign Jake, kept one FAC airborne from sunrise to sunset with one-half hour overlap of missions, and the VNAF had one FAC airborne a good portion of the day in support of the 2d ARVN Division's operations. The USAF TACP at Chu Lai, with the call sign Helix, supported the Americal Division with two Helix FACs, one

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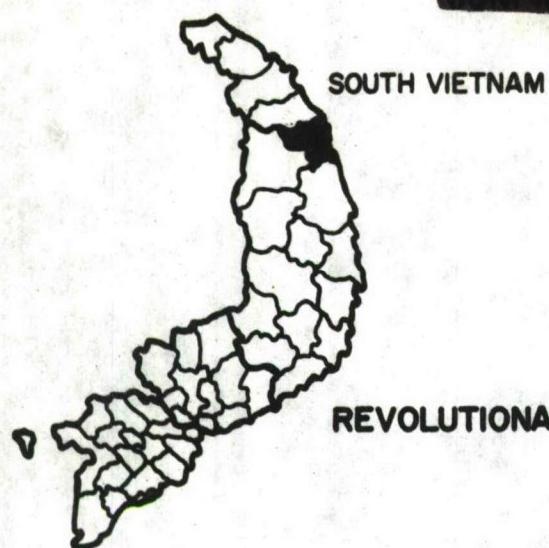
with the 198th Brigade and the other with the 11th Brigade.

The Jake and VNAF FACs flew over the entire province performing random visual reconnaissance and directing airstrikes as needed. They attempted to cover the entire area each day by monitoring the previous flight's coverage and the activity log; however, the size of the province prohibited a close inspection of the whole area. Thus, each FAC covered his own special areas of suspected infiltration and branched out from there. They spent a good deal of time between the foothills and western edges of the Special Forces Camp AOs and sometimes pushed farther into the western extremities of the province. The Helix FACs primarily directed their attention within their Brigade AOs east of the Special Forces Camps but also spent some time farther west.

When not directing airstrikes, all of the FACs attempted to locate enemy infiltration trails, supply caches, unit and base camp facilities, and any and all indications of enemy activity and location. The Jake FACs called any unusual sightings to the TACP radio operator and then after landing, recorded them on a visual reconnaissance (VR) activity log with a recommendation whether or not the target was worthy of an airstrike.

The Helix FACs called their sightings in to the ground commander or the Battalion TACP. They had discontinued writing the information down after landing at Chu Lai, because it took too long to disseminate and was redundant. These sightings formed an important input for the selection of preplanned targets.
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QUANG NGAI

REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT AREAS

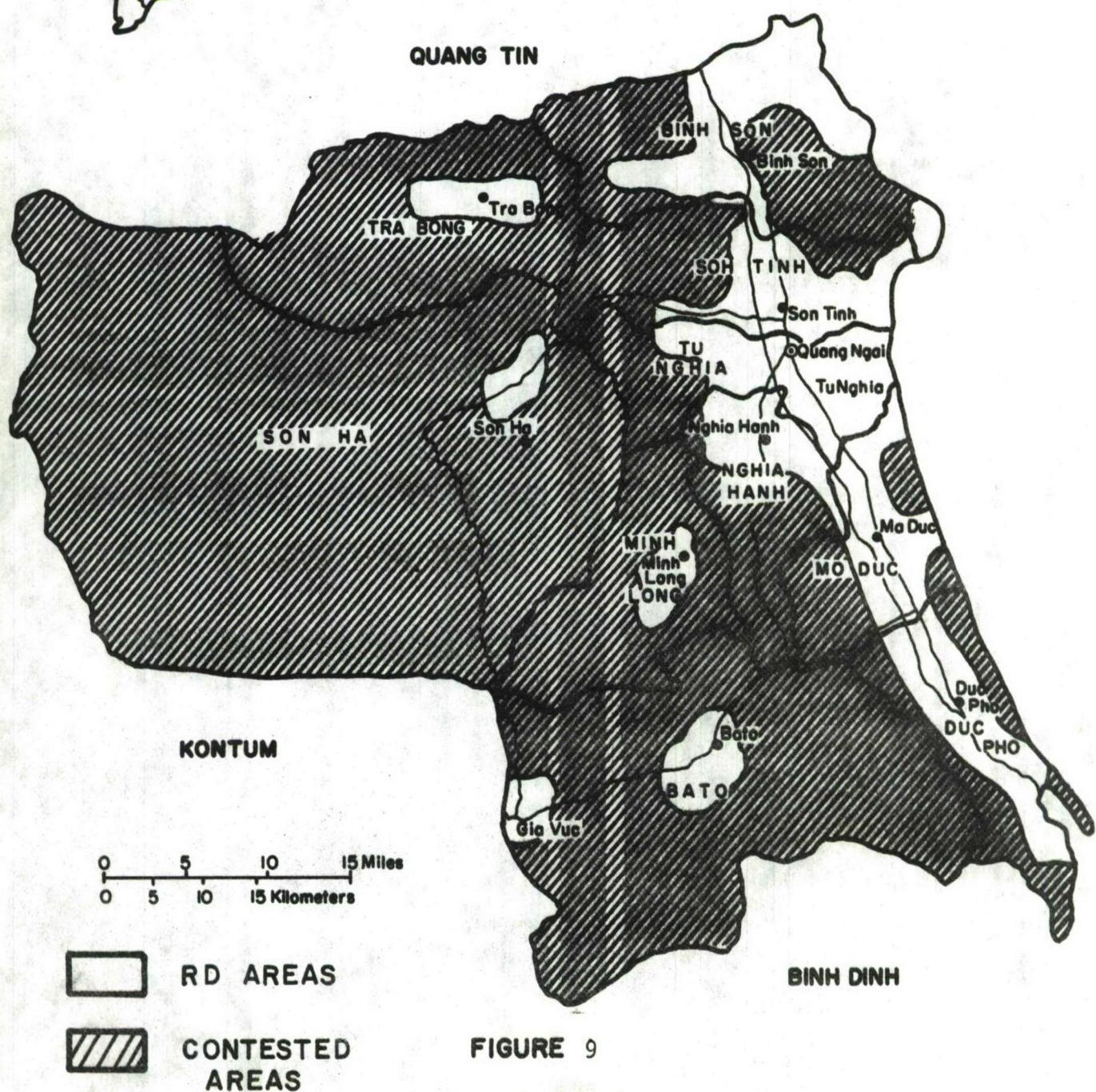


FIGURE 9

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Preplanned Airstrikes

The government controlled area in Quang Ngai Province expanded slowly after 1965, and by December 1969 included most of the coastal flatlands (Fig. 9) and the small areas guarded by the Special Forces Camps to the west. Revolutionary Development Programs proceeded within these areas, and the boundary surrounding them was referred to as the RD line. The boundary changed from month to month, and pockets appeared and disappeared. This instability presented coordination problems and kept the FDCCs on their toes.

The District Chiefs labeled the area within the RD line as "controlled fire zones" and personally retained the clearing authority for all firing or delivery of ordnance within these zones. However, they usually granted blanket political clearance to be used at the discretion of the ground commanders operating in the AOs outside the RD lines. As this was primarily enemy territory, nearly all preplanned targets fell within these areas. ^{2/}

Division, Brigade, Regiment, Battalion, and Special Forces Camp Headquarters all had access to the wide variety of intelligence sources which had developed to identify enemy activity. These included FAC and Army Visual Reconnaissance sightings, Agent reports, Airborne Personnel Detector (APD), Infrared Readings (IR), Side-Looking Airborne Radar (SLAR), Special Agent Reports (SPAR) or (URI), Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRP), Sensors, Aerial Photos, Prisoner of War Reports, and captured documents.

The extent each of these sources influenced the selection of targets

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depended upon the experience and dedication of current operations and intelligence personnel and the type of target being hit. None of the headquarters had kept any usable records to indicate what targets had been hit in the past or what damage had been inflicted upon them. They stated this information was of no real value because the enemy habitually kept returning to the same areas and used previously destroyed facilities to camouflage new hiding places. However, the G-2 Advisor at the 2d ARVN Division had started a target card file on which he placed all significant intelligence pertaining to a target and intended to add the BDA after the target had been hit. He had also started target folders with 10,000 meter grid maps on which he plotted the target information with a narrative and history of the area.

Because the enemy moved so frequently, information indicating troop locations usually had to be acted upon quickly. Consequently, most of the requests for airstrikes to hit troop locations were based upon one-source intelligence. The most common were URI, LRRP, Agent, and VR reports. These were referred to as fleeting or soft targets.

A more sophisticated system of plotting overlays from multiple-source intelligence was used to identify fixed targets. These included base camps, rest areas, training areas, staging areas, supply caches, food centers, munition factories, bridges, trails, and roads. When several sources identified the location of one of these targets, the intelligence was usually verified by VR and aerial photography before a request was submitted for an airstrike. Americal and 2d ARVN Division headquarters

usually requested ARC LIGHT support when multiple-source intelligence indicated a buildup of an enemy battalion or larger sized force at one location.

It was not possible to determine the exact percentage of targets nominated by one-source or multiple-source intelligence. However, for a 30-day period in February-March 1970, more than 80 percent of the Americal Division requests from Quang Ngai Province were based on one-source intelligence. This percentage undoubtedly varied considerably over the years. Because of its different approach, probably over 80 percent of the 2d ARVN Division's requests had been based on multiple-source, VR verified intelligence.

A close examination of the preplanned targets hit in 1968 and 1969 revealed a decided difference in approach between the Americal and 2d ARVN Divisions. The Americal Division directed the vast majority of its preplanned airstrikes against enemy troop locations, whereas the 2d ARVN Division concentrated upon hitting fixed targets, with an emphasis upon intercepting the logistical LOC network to the west.

The difference resulted from the way airpower was managed in each division. Targets originated at the battalion level in the Americal Division. Brigade and division headquarters only occasionally added requests at their levels, and they seldom questioned the priority of the requests established at battalion level. In allocating the available airstrikes daily, both division and brigade attempted to divide them equally among

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their subordinate units. Only occasionally did heavy enemy activity dictate otherwise. The result was a salt and pepper pattern of airstrikes distributed fairly evenly throughout the battalion AOs in the eastern half of the province, moving a little east or west with enemy activity and ^{6/} weather.

This system subjected enemy units to single airstrikes frequently. The fleeting nature of troop locations dictated that more recent intelligence caused daily changes in the targets. In 1969, forty-eight percent of the preplanned airstrikes were diverted from the targets requested. As Americal FACs lived at division headquarters in Chu Lai, they did not personally ^{7/} participate in the selection of targets.

The 2d ARVN Division managed its airstrikes at division level. Regiments submitted target requests but most requests were generated at division headquarters. Prior to the fall of 1969, nearly all of the targets were selected by the FAC/ALO in conjunction with the G-2 and G-3 Air Advisors. At that time, the ARVN officers began to take over this responsibility from the Advisors with the creation of a target committee. Except during the few occasions when the enemy threatened Quang Ngai City, most of the ARVN airstrikes in good weather were directed against the logistical LOC in the ^{8/} western part of the province.

The targets were identified on the target requests by a six-digit coordinate and a target description. The majority of these descriptions

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ENEMY STRENGTH FOR QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

<u>1968</u>	<u>MANEUVER</u>	<u>CBT SPT</u>	<u>ADMIN SVC</u>	<u>GUERRILLA</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
JAN	3,110	350	1,060	5,471	9,991
FEB	2,355	275	900	5,471	9,001
MAR	2,355	275	900	5,471	9,001
APR	2,730	275	900	4,331	8,236
MAY	2,530	275	900	4,331	8,036
JUN	5,165	275	900	4,331	10,671
JUL	5,820	275	900	3,875	10,870
AUG	7,130	275	900	3,875	12,180
SEP	8,345		900	3,875	13,120
OCT	7,310		900	3,030	11,240
NOV	6,150	2,050	1,025	3,030	12,255
DEC	6,240	2,050	1,025	3,030	12,345
<hr/>					
<u>1969</u>					
JAN	5,700	2,050	1,025	2,728	11,503
FEB	5,970	2,050	1,025	3,804	12,849
MAR	5,495	2,050	1,025	3,848	12,418
APR	5,425	2,050	1,025	3,880	12,380
MAY	6,325	2,050	1,295	3,939	13,609
JUN	6,085	2,325	995	3,132	12,537
JUL	6,620	2,325	995	3,239	13,179
AUG	6,620	2,325	1,230	3,095	13,270
SEP	7,320	2,325	1,230	3,021	13,896
OCT	7,570	2,325	1,230	3,063	14,188
NOV	7,570	2,325	1,230	3,091	14,216
DEC	5,940	2,325	1,230	3,232	12,727

SOURCE: MACV (CICV)

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merely identified the target as: (1) base camp; (2) known enemy location (KEL); and (3) suspected enemy location (SEL). This was the only information available to the FAC. In addition, particularly with URI and Agent reports, the coordinates themselves were only approximate locations. These factors, combined with the fact that almost all of the target areas were covered by thick jungle canopy, presented a serious target identification problem to the FAC.

As the FAC attempted to identify where the enemy might have built his bunkers or structures beneath the thick foliage, he had to rely on out-guessing the enemy's attempts to deceive him. As a complex of bunkers might be scattered over a particular area, the only solution was to try one point and see if anything could be uncovered. ^{9/}

Preplanned Airstrikes Impact on Enemy

Due to the difficulty of observing bomb damage through thick foliage and the great number of airstrikes reported as "results not observed," reported Bomb Damage Assessments (BDA) only reflected a portion of the total destruction of enemy installations and personnel. However, when reported BDA was pieced together with information derived from enemy intelligence, the evidence indicated that preplanned airstrikes kept the enemy off balance, disrupted his activities, and seriously restricted his operational capabilities. The cumulative impact of numerous small losses showed up in many ^{10/} areas.

Reported BDA showed that enemy troops caught out of fortified bunkers

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suffered severe casualties which amounted in some cases to 80 percent or more of their personnel and supplies. Because of this fact, the NVA/VC were forced to construct heavily fortified bunkers which protected them from practically anything but a direct hit. 11/

The enemy built these bunkers whenever a unit stayed at one place for more than a few days. One type, used for sleeping and airstrike protection for six to eight personnel, normally took three men five days to complete. Besides living quarters, they constructed kitchen facilities, headquarters buildings, supply areas, and took extensive efforts to camouflage the entire base area. Frequently, soldiers dug extensive tunnels to connect the various facilities.

All of this construction took tremendous effort. The time and energy thus expended were multiplied by the fact that experience taught the enemy that a prolonged stay in any one camp was a sure invitation to destruction by airstrikes. The VC Quang Ngai Provincial Headquarters and all subordinate units reportedly moved at least once a month. Some units moved two and even three times a month.

As a consequence, a great deal of enemy effort, which could have been channeled into preparation for or conducting offensive operations, was spent in simply moving from place to place. Each move involved extensive construction of fortifications, thereby sapping enemy strength. The constant transient status made it extremely difficult to provide for even the most elementary comforts. Many Hoi Chans (ralliers) listed among

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FAC Marking Target
FIGURE 11

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their reasons for defecting, not only the constant fear of airstrikes, but also the constant moving around and the monotony of building one base camp after another.

Prisoner of War reports consistently elaborated on the deterioration of morale due to the constant worry and horror of being hit by airstrikes. Some VC party members resigned and others refused to carry out their missions. Frequently, soldiers falsely reported on sick call and even wounded themselves to avoid leaving the rear areas.

Numbers of NVA soldiers, frequently in groups of 50 or more, deserted and formed outlaw groups which lived by raiding VC hamlets and food-carrying parties. After one B-52 strike, which killed 50 and wounded 30, one hundred troops deserted their unit. Enemy cadres were forced to establish strict control measures to prevent further desertions. They increased political indoctrination lectures and never allowed individuals to be alone.

Soldiers also met increased protests against their presence from villagers who feared retaliatory airstrikes. One captive reported the constant harassment of FAC aircraft had thoroughly demoralized his battalion.

In addition to these problems, the threat of airstrikes forced the enemy to disperse his forces into company and smaller units. Being scattered in numerous small base areas, at considerable distances from each other, seriously impaired the enemy's ability to defend himself against friendly operations. It created difficult problems of command, control, and training. A captive reported that the 2d NVA Regiment canceled its post-Tet

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offensive in 1970 because the units were too spread out to mass for an attack.

The proliferation of the enemy's logistical lines of communications (LOC) greatly magnified his supply problems. Five transportation battalions operated in Quang Ngai Province. Their personnel were used for production, boat, bicycle, and foot transportation. To avoid detection, transportation units moved at night or on carefully hidden trails under thick jungle canopy in the day. They stored their supplies in carefully camouflaged positions which took considerable effort to construct.

The continual movement of units made it extremely difficult to keep the proper supplies flowing to the right places. The long distances made the system highly susceptible to small losses which caused serious shortages to isolated units and disrupted operations because they did not have the right thing, at the right place, at the right time.

The interdiction campaign in Laos largely restricted the flow of supplies from NVN to weapons, ammunition, and medical supplies. As the entire NVN effort was required just to keep enough weapons and ammunition flowing to support the past level of operations, medical supplies became critical, and the NVA/VC in Quang Ngai Province were forced to locally procure or manufacture all other supplies. To offset these shortages the enemy was forced to set up facilities for agriculture production, clothing repair and manufacturing shops, blacksmith shops, munitions factories (for producing homemade explosives), sampan factories, bicycle repair shops, etc., in the

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western mountains of Quang Ngai and Quang Tin Provinces.

All of these facilities and caches along the supply routes were susceptible to destruction by airstrikes. Starting in the summer of 1968, the 2d ARVN Division began a systematic program to interdict and destroy these targets. Analysts combined all sources of intelligence with intensive visual reconnaissance by FAC and Army aircraft to fit together a picture of what was under the jungle canopy.

As fixed targets developed, the majority of the preplanned airstrikes were programmed against such areas. In mid-1969, intelligence confirmed that constant pressure against the logistics network had forced the 3d NVA Division Headquarters to move its rear base from the Dak Selo area to Area 128, following a series of B-52 and tactical airstrikes.

Captives reported that airstrikes made the movement of supplies difficult and created critical shortages of medicine, clothing, and foodstuff. The most severe shortage was in foodstuff. As friendly food-denial operations and spray missions became more effective, many prisoners reported their units were existing on 350-500 grams of rice a day, as opposed to a previous diet of 1,500 grams. Numerous reports indicated that malnutrition, illness, and low morale had sapped the enemy's strength and seriously impaired his operational capability. At one time, the 403d Sapper Battalion had in excess of 50 percent of its troops down with malaria and other illnesses. The excessive time and effort devoted to acquiring food and supplies also limited the enemy's combat potential. The combat strength he could

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maintain in the province was limited to the numbers he could feed and equip. In the past, the NVA/VC had been operating at one-half their authorized Table of Organization and Equipment.

The G-2 ARVN Advisor was optimistic about improving the ability to identify targets. An experimental trap system, using ground surveillance/sensor equipment, had been set up around the Tra My transshipment point. The initial results had given analysts a better picture of the pattern of enemy movement, distribution of input, and location of storage sites in the area.

The logistical lines leading from the mountains to the coast were also susceptible to disruption by airstrikes. During the offensive of 1968 and 1969, major enemy units established pre-stock points for ammunition and supplies between their assembly areas and their objectives. However, the vulnerability of these caches to airstrikes forced the enemy to change this tactic.

In preparation for the post-Tet offensive of 1969, the 2d VC Regiment established a series of pre-stock caches on the coastal plain at the base of the hills south of Nghia Hanh District Headquarters. At the end of the Tet truce, a FAC observed fresh diggings in the same area where he had noted an NVA flag earlier. The FAC requested an airstrike and the first set of fighters set off a large secondary explosion. The second set, put in just before dusk, resulted in a secondary explosion and a large sustained fire that burned for 40 minutes with a bright white flame. Preplanned airstrikes

AIRSTRIKES IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE																													
DATE	VNAF INT	USN INT	USAF INT	USMC INT	SORTIES			BLDG HUTS INT			BUNK HUTS INT			BOMB HUTS INT			SEC INT			EXP CAS			KBA INT			CAS			
					USAF CAS	USN CAS	USMC CAS	TOTAL CAS	INT CAS	INT CAS	BUNK CAS	HUTS CAS	INT CAS	BOMB CAS	HUTS CAS	INT CAS	SEC CAS	INT CAS	EXP CAS	KBA INT	CAS	INT CAS	INT CAS	INT CAS	INT CAS				
1968																													
JAN	15	2	38	144	87	51	189	132	197	35	56	38	41	-	-	6	136	159											
FEB	41		112	98	25	153	123	238	337	30	37	112	118	-	5	584	237												
MAR	72		96	89	14	168	103	337	178	51	219	105	-	4	63	237													
APR	22		79	42	24	101	66	132	20	21	73	15	7	2	33														
MAY	12		42	29	23	54	52	78	62	101	2	12	2	2	30														
JUN	6		68	101	28	74	129	24	101	222	10	4	63	28	21	5	27	103	23										
JUL	6		119	184	33	125	217	36	222	10	12	36	28	21	5	30													
AUG	42		552	332	131	594	463	509	371	29	42	393	104	208	23	27	103	23											
SEP	42		452	296	227	494	523	151	366	26	53	352	127	291	19	69	69	21											
OCT	27		291	212	148	318	360	112	351	10	60	599	141	33	33	33	37	13	4	46									
NOV	69		6	121	42	659	240	707	111	420	9	64	85	297	13	3	13	13	3	46									
DEC	49	13	6	129	48	223	178	384	265	48	271	48	10	43	15	15	15	15	15	46									
			6	214	167	—	172	2550	3316	2320	2735	2735	1235	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	1205	
1969																													
JAN	28	2	9	151	60	578	179	640	201	627	31	71	71	28	28	16	16	11	7										
FEB	44		4	191	148	394	254	464	401	796	125	69	79	383	8	24	24	23	23										
MAR	68		2	323	136	832	259	984	402	154	19	125	172	691	10	26	26	26	26										
APR			3	303	286	779	323	917	513	112	92	92	374	59	624	12	31	31	6										
MAY					2	850	305	1139	408	663	60	60	235	136	226	74	43	43	2	40									
JUN					4	457	279	916	588	72	87	143	151	814	151	814	49	49	49	2	31								
JUL	33		275	459	4	536	325	842	465	985	95	66	118	458	17	53	28	28	22										
AUG	85		2	226	257	590	311	847	372	796	41	70	52	268	34	78	22	22	20										
SEP	80	4	2	163	267	284	243	557	424	567	83	69	45	288	21	288	21	22	22	50									
OCT	64		7	141	141	135	135	385	252	495	21	20	63	167	4	167	4	19	5										
NOV	78		65	65	111	143	353	149	166	287	78	185	57	12	4	12	4	5	5										
DEC	54	13	7	18	18	176	176	176	176	4253	4253	5618	585	1046	1287	265	4287	265	315	315									

INT = INTERDICTION
 CAS = DIRECT AND CLOSE AIR SUPPORT

SOURCE: MACV (DMA)

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were requested for the following day. A total of 18 strikes put into a ^{12/} four-grid square area resulted in numerous secondary explosions and fires.

Intelligence obtained later from prisoners revealed these caches had been a pre-stock area for the 2d VC Regiment, and a substantial part of its basic load for the forthcoming attack was destroyed. The attack went off on schedule but elements of the 2d VC Regiment were unable to hold their counter-sweep positions as long as planned.

After that experience, enemy elements decreased their use of pre-stock caches in Quang Ngai province. Reports stated that Military Region 5 (headquarters for six enemy provinces) had ordered its sub-units to adopt a new tactic designated "Von Tap." The tactic was designed to reduce the risk of the discovery of troops and supplies prior to the attack. The plan called for each soldier to carry all of his supplies from a distant assembly point and to withdraw immediately following the attack. Due to increased fatigue and the short time at the objective, the tactic decreased effectiveness of the enemy.

In summary, the cumulative impact of numerous small losses kept the enemy off balance and seriously disrupted his operational capability. He had to move at night and hide in the daytime. The dispersal of NVA/VC forces into small units, which had to move constantly, created serious problems of command and control and made it extremely difficult to prepare or mass for an offensive. The large amount of time devoted to moving and constructing fortifications seriously impaired the NVA/VC combat resources.

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The proliferation of NVA/VC logistical lines over great distances and the necessity of procuring locally almost all of their supplies, except weapons and ammunition, caused the enemy to commit large numbers of personnel to these efforts.

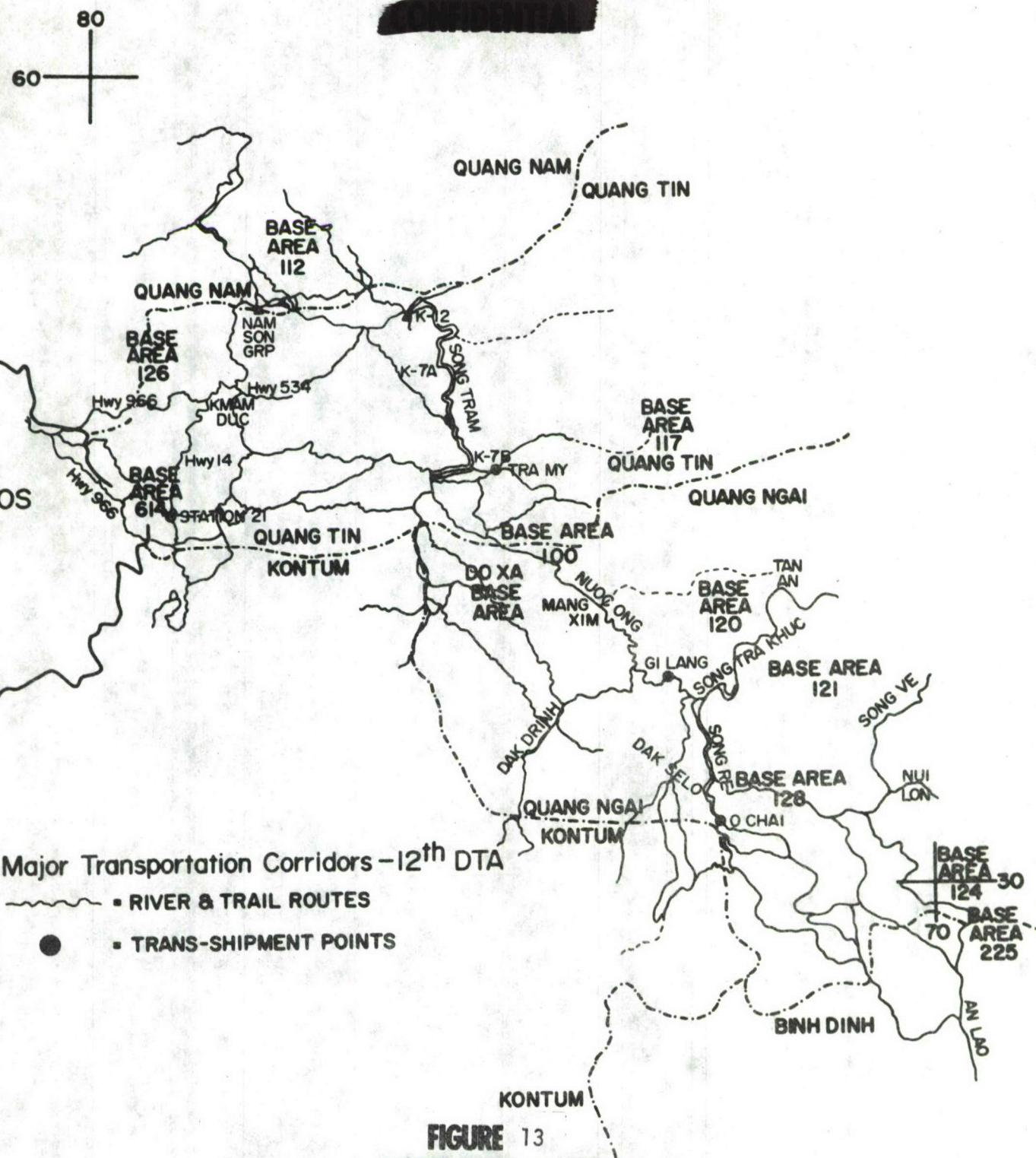
This system was frequently disrupted by airstrikes which contributed to critical shortages in many units, thus impairing their combat potential. Enemy units were frequently caught in the position of having sufficient supplies in the system but not having the right thing, at the right place, at the right time. Reluctance to pre-stock supplies for an attack reduced the enemy's ability to sustain an offensive. And the fear of airstrikes, sickness, shortage of supplies, and the fatiguing drudgery of constantly moving and digging fortifications created serious morale problems which threatened to undermine the cadres' control of their troops. ^{13/}

Landing Zone and Objective Preps

Landing Zone (LZ) and Objective Preps were second in priority to requests for airstrikes in support of units in contact with the enemy. The general difference between the two was that an LZ Prep generally supported a combat assault (CA) into an area by air, while an Objective Prep supported a CA by land.

A review of operations and discussions with ground commanders revealed a general agreement with accomplishments of the LZ and Objective Preps but some disagreement on when they should be used. Ground commanders measured the contributions of airstrikes by comparing their effects to those obtained

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from artillery and gunships.

It was generally agreed that airstrikes added the following destructive capabilities to those which could be obtained by artillery and gunships: (1) cleared away heavy foliage; (2) destroyed fortified positions such as bunkers and tunnels; (3) detonated mines and booby traps; (4) were more responsive and accurate than artillery; (5) achieved greater concentration of firepower; and (6) reached areas inaccessible to artillery.

It followed that when the combat assault took place in an area of heavy foliage, fortified enemy positions, and suspected mines and booby traps, ground commanders requested airstrikes for LZ and Objective Preps along with artillery and gunships. Geography dictated that this was the case more often in the mountainous jungles than on the coastal flatlands. If the above conditions were not strong factors, artillery and gunships were deemed sufficient.

Disagreement came in the grey area of evaluating the enemy situation and threat. As airstrikes gave away the element of surprise, a few commanders believed this was an extremely important factor and gave it great weight in their decision. One in particular liked to use a short ten-minute prep of artillery followed by gunship suppressive fire ahead of the CA. Others reasoned that even a short artillery prep gave away the element of surprise, and therefore airstrikes might as well be used if there were any question of the enemy situation.

The extent LZ and Objective Preps were used therefore varied with each

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unit and with each change of ground commanders. The figures for earlier years were not available; however, in 1969, units used the following air-strikes for LZ and Objective Preps: Americal 88, 2d ARVN 19, SF Camps 22. ^{14/}

Close Air Support

Immediate airstrikes for close air support (CAS) formed an integral part of tactical ground operations in Quang Ngai Province. Ground commanders considered CAS an efficient and necessary extension of available firepower in both offensive and defensive operations. Nearly all of the commanders and soldiers interviewed could cite at least one battle, and many of them several battles, in which airstrikes had been the decisive factor in their ability to take an enemy position or, more important, had saved their unit from being overrun and possibly annihilated. All accorded high praise to the support provided by the FAC, fighter, and Air Force gunship aircraft.

When asked how he felt about air support, in an interview on 17 March 1970, Maj. Gen. Lloyd B. Ramsey, Commander of the Americal Division, said:

"It is difficult to make enough complimentary remarks because it's so damn good. Whether it's from the Air Force or the Marines or what source. FAC relations with the ground commanders are excellent. They identify the targets and put the airstrikes on a dime. They do as well as the information available. You couldn't ask for any better air support than we have received in this war."

None of the Special Forces, ARVN, or Americal units visited had knowledge of any written doctrine governing the employment of airpower. Written instructions available pertained to the request system, communications,

80
60

220 []

QUANG NAM
160 [] 70C QUANG TIN

QUANG NAM
QUANG TIN

? [] 230th

? [] 230th

559 GRP
ENGR &
TRANS

HANOI
HIGH
COMMAND

LAOS

? [] 230th

QUANG TIN
KONTUM

230 []

? [] 230th

QUANG TIN
QUANG NGAI

241 [] 240

244 [] 240

240 []

242 [] 240
POSS

243 [] 240

245 [] 240

248 [] 240
POSTAL &
COMMUNICATIONS

The 248th P&C Bn. operates throughout
Quang Ngai and Quang Tin provinces, as well
as N. Binh Dinh and Kontum.

30
70

BINH DINH

[] 250

FIGURE 14

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marking positions, safe distances, and ordnance capabilities. However, interviews and a review of After Action Reports from 1965 through 1969 revealed a reasonable procedure of first trying to dislodge the enemy with organic firepower. If this proved ineffective, the commander called for artillery and then gunships. If these were insufficient, then he requested air support.

Nevertheless, there were notable exceptions. In many instances, commanders called for airstrikes at the first sign of sniper activity. Others tried to assault the enemy position and did not request air support unless they were repulsed. Most commanders requested artillery, gunships, and airstrikes all at once, if they received heavy fire from a large force which seemed to be well fortified. Some commanders pulled back and waited for repeated gunship and airstrike attacks to dislodge the enemy. Others used air support as a protective cover for maneuver and assaulted the enemy before the debris from the last airstrike settled to the ground. Consequently, no set procedure emerged from the many battles fought. ^{16/}

Although their individual tactics varied and changed as they gained experience and confidence in employing airstrikes in proximity to their troops, all of the commanders interviewed agreed that airstrikes were essential when the enemy was dug-in under dense foliage or in heavily fortified bunkers, tunnels, or trenchlines. Artillery and gunships temporarily suppressed enemy fire, but each time the gunship pulled off or an artillery shell was not impacting, the enemy came out of his hole and fired.

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Under these conditions, a small enemy force could effectively hold off a much larger friendly unit. Airstrikes made the difference. Bombs and napalm burnt and blew away the foliage so friendlies could see the enemy's positions; they destroyed the bunkers, caved in the tunnels, and decimated the trenchlines and fighting positions. They struck fear into the enemy's heart. If a unit were under heavy attack, artillery and gunships slowed the enemy down, but airstrikes stopped him dead in his tracks.

Airstrikes were more responsive and accurate than artillery in a tight situation, and they provided far greater firepower and destructive capability than either gunships or artillery. They were a logical extension of fire-power and ground commanders depended upon them heavily.^{17/}

A review of four years of After Action Reports and numerous personal interviews told the same story time and again. A friendly force came under fire from a fortified enemy position. The commander requested immediate air support. After one or more airstrikes, the enemy retreated or put up little resistance when the friendlies assaulted the position. Or, if the friendlies had been heavily outnumbered, they managed to withdraw under the protective cover of the fighters. A few examples will illustrate this point.

On 14 January 1970, a Special Forces Reconnaissance company contacted a fortified NVA company. After eight airstrikes, the NVA retreated. A sweep of the area the next day located 40 KBA and five bunkers destroyed.^{18/}

In September 1969, a battalion of the 4th ARVN Regiment was assaulted

ENEMY INCIDENTS IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

TYPE OF INCIDENT	1968												1969											
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Large Attacks	6	2	0	1	2	2	1	5	2	0	2	2	1	4	2	0	3	2	0	3	1	1	0	0
Small Attacks	12	11	4	6	8	3	5	28	36	7	11	17	13	42	62	21	32	33	17	47	13	15	4	10
Attack by Fire	36	43	38	25	72	28	38	66	72	43	46	52	41	59	112	42	91	78	58	82	44	33	24	32
Ambush	6	9	3	3	2	1	3	7	8	4	3	0	2	3	4	3	4	1	1	1	4	2	2	4
Terrorism	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	3	1	5	1	4	6	2	2	1	12	5	3	4
Kidnapping	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	4	5	4	2	2	0	7	1	2	3	2	1	0
Mining	2	4	3	2	1	8	6	12	6	2	4	5	5	2	10	9	4	14	29	0	37	37	25	48
Road Sabotage	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	7	3	0	0	2	2	1	0	1	3	1	2	0	0	0
Bridge Sabotage	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	6	4	2	1	2	3	6	2	7	0	2	1	4	0	0	0	0
Other Harassment	6	12	6	8	16	7	9	5	10	4	3	5	6	15	35	21	36	27	25	39	20	14	2	0
Total Incidents	70	85	55	47	104	50	64	131	139	64	81	93	77	140	232	111	177	166	135	182	135	107	61	98

FIGURE 15

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OPERATIONAL CONTACTS IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

	1968				1969			
	Large	KIA	Small	KIA	Large	KIA	Small	KIA
Jan	19	549	?	?	27	234	183	276
Feb	10	1010	65	87	18	388	201	410
Mar	14	341	131	135	28	1453	161	356
Apr	15	171	146	202	22	622	18	40
May	8	66	103	111	21	735	29	35
Jun	10	145	139	167	23	853	18	51
Jul	10	78	190	280	17	396	22	43
Aug	6	133	175	249	20	474	25	99
Sep	18	701	122	189	14	344	15	22
Oct	11	189	142	156	13	178	26	79
Nov	19	477	144	321	19	289	23	78
Dec	14	183	171	291	16	306	12	29
TOTAL	154	4043	1528	2188	238	6272	733	1518

FIGURE 16

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by a VC battalion while digging in for the night. Airstrikes from 1700 to 2000 hours broke the attack. Friendlies suffered light casualties and the enemy 40 KBA.

The ARVN 4/6 came under automatic weapons and Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) fire from a fortified NVA Heavy Weapons company on 12 June 1969. After losing one Armored Personnel Carrier (APC), they drew back and called for immediate air support. Seven airstrikes hit the enemy position between 1230 and 1700 hours. That night the NVA retreated to the south. The Advisor to the Battalion, 2d Lt. Kenneth J. Richardson, expressed the conviction that airstrikes had prevented his unit from being overrun by the enemy.

In November 1969, an Americal company was pinned in a valley by enemy fire from three sides. Three airstrikes suppressed the fire and allowed them to escape with few casualties.

For three days, an Americal Fire Support Base received mortar, RPG, and AK-47 fire from a VC unit fortified on a nearby hill. A Cavalry troop with 20 APCs and an Infantry company attempted to assault the hill but were pushed off by withering fire. They requested air support and, after four airstrikes, assaulted and took the hill.

On 20 June 1969, the same Cavalry troop with 18 APCs and an Americal platoon assaulted a VC fortified village but were driven back by heavy enemy fire. The commander called for help and received four airstrikes in the next one and one-half hours. One bomb made a direct hit on a small

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structure just after five VC closed the door. The napalm decimated the VC in the trenchlines and allowed the friendlies to sweep through the 23/ village with little resistance.

A company of the Americal Division was pinned in a draw by fire from a fortified enemy position on the high ground. They had taken heavy casualties. An immediate request for help brought fighters overhead within 20 minutes. While the fighters suppressed the enemy fire, a medevac chopper extracted the wounded. After four more airstrikes, the company easily assaulted and 24/ took the enemy position.

Just before daybreak in September 1969, a Marine Combined Action Program (CAP) team and PF platoon at OP-George were attacked by an NVA battalion. They were taking grenades, satchel charges, and automatic weapons inside the perimeter. Artillery, gunships, and airstrikes were requested. Gunships and four airstrikes arrived at first light and broke the attack. The enemy 25/ retreated to the west after losing 116 KIA.

In late August 1969, Tra Bong Special Forces Camp was surrounded by an NVA battalion which threatened to overrun the camp. For five days fighter-aircraft relentlessly pounded the enemy, forcing him to retreat. 26/

On 5 May 1969, Capt. Charles E. Wilhelm, Senior Advisor to the ARVN 4/5, moved with his battalion to join the Americal 1/46 in a combat sweep about five miles west of Chu Lai. As Captain Wilhelm's battalion moved along a river, they came under attack by an NVA battalion reinforced by a heavy

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weapons company. The first wave of fire killed the ARVN Battalion Commander and inflicted heavy casualties.

Captain Wilhelm soon determined the enemy had them surrounded on three sides. He directed his men to dig into the stream bed and called for artillery, gunships, and airstrikes. The artillery came up immediately but caused little damage as the NVA were fortified in concrete bunkers on the ridge. Four sets of gunships relieved the artillery and succeeded in suppressing the enemy fire for a spell, but every time they pulled off, the enemy commenced firing again.

While the battalion lay low in the stream bed, between 1230 and 2000 hours that evening, FACs directed ten airstrikes against the enemy locations. The proximity of 75 to 100 meters put the friendlies in the fragmentary envelope, and shrapnel flew over their heads. But they had no choice. One friendly received a wound from shrapnel because he failed to keep down. A short round of napalm burned two others.

As night set in, the fighters had succeeded in completely silencing the enemy fire, and the battalion moved safely downstream. Captain Wilhelm expressed the conviction that CAS saved his battalion from being overrun and possibly annihilated. The fortified enemy positions rendered the ^{27/} artillery and gunships ineffective.

Ranger Platoon Leader, 2d Lt. Gerl E. Freeland, was on a Long-Range Patrol deep in the mountains of western Quang Ngai Province. The patrol

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received word to move out as the division planned to place an ARC LIGHT strike in the area. As the patrol moved quickly through the jungle, they noticed the enemy had picked up their location. They slipped quietly into an open area and hid in the 12-foot elephant grass. The rangers could hear the enemy searching but could not identify his exact location.

Lieutenant Freeland called for help and shortly thereafter, a FAC arrived overhead. The FAC identified the patrol's position from the flashes of their signal mirrors and informed Lieutenant Freeland he could see about 30 to 40 enemy soldiers searching some 40 meters to the west and another 15 to 20 about the same distance to the north. The FAC diverted a flight of fighters on their way to a preplanned target, and as they came into view, about five minutes later, instructed the rangers to mark their position with smoke and lay low.

Because of the proximity of the enemy to the rangers, the fighters could not drop their bombs or napalm. The FAC directed the fighter's passes on the enemy positions as they strafed with 20-mm cannon. About 20 minutes later, two rescue helicopters accompanied by two gunships arrived.

Under heavy suppressive fire, the rescue choppers succeeded in slipping in and extracting the rangers from their precarious position. With the rangers safely airborne, the FAC continued the attack by directing the fighters to unload their bombs and napalm on the enemy position.

ARC LIGHT - QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

BDA

<u>DATE</u>	<u>SORTIES</u>	<u>KBA</u>	<u>SEC EXP</u>	<u>STRUC</u>	<u>BUNK</u>
1968					
JAN					
FEB					
MAR					
APR					
MAY					
JUN					
JUL	18		3		
AUG	158	26	166	12	28
SEP	87		77	73	11
OCT	146	164	23	50	193
NOV	132	9	31	97	16
DEC					
	<u>541</u>	<u>199</u>	<u>300</u>	<u>232</u>	<u>248</u>
1969					
JAN	24				
FEB	41		4		
MAR	12				
APR	24		2		
MAY	61		35		
JUN	9	26	20		
JUL	24			54	46
AUG					
SEP					
OCT	44		50	6	5
NOV	6				
DEC	6				
	<u>251</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>111</u>	<u>63</u>	<u>51</u>

FIGURE 17

Lieutenant Freeland expressed the conviction that the timely arrival of
the FAC and fighters saved his patrol from being killed or captured. ^{28/}

In the middle of August 1969, 1st Lt. Daniel S. Burks led a CIDG
Special Forces patrol into a deep valley at the western extremity of
the Ba To AO. Just at dusk, they received fire from a ridgeline. The
patrol selected positions in which to hide for the night, but the enemy
saw their location and started hitting them with mortars at midnight.
Nineteen were wounded in the barrage.

Lieutenant Burks called for help; 30 minutes later artillery
started firing and in 45 minutes, a Spooky Air Force gunship arrived
overhead. The Spooky worked over the area and the enemy ceased firing.
At first light, a Jake FAC arrived with the first of six airstrikes.
Under cover of the suppressive fire, a medevac chopper extracted the
wounded. The patrol laid low about 500-600 meters from the ridge as
the fighters dropped their bombs and napalm and strafed with 20-mm
cannon. Lieutenant Burks said the NVA soldiers stood up and fired at
the fighters after the pilots released their ordnance and then dove
into their holes just before the bombs impacted.

After the airstrikes, the patrol received only sporadic sniper fire
from the enemy position. Lieutenant Burks observed that rockets and
guns did not really bother the enemy when he was dug-in. He just waited
until the gunships left and then came out and started firing. But bombs
and napalm destroyed his fortifications and drove him from his positions.

Airstrikes were decisive in breaking enemy contact. Lieutenant Burks said his patrol often operated out of range of artillery and depended on airstrikes. Otherwise, they had to run when they made heavy contact
29/
and were in danger of not getting out.

While most of the immediate airstrikes were called in support of small unit contacts, occasionally CAS was called to turn the tide in large defensive engagements.

On 23 May 1968, the 4th Regiment, 2d ARVN Division, reacted to intelligence that an NVA/VC force was gathering to attack Quang Ngai City. At 0730H, the 1/4 APC and 2d Recon Co reached the 4/5 Bn and came under heavy automatic weapons, small arms, mortar, and B-40 rocket fire. Although gunships continued to deliver supporting fire, the ARVN forces were halted and could not maneuver.

At 1200H, a set of VNAF A-1Es began dropping ordnance in an erratic and hazardous manner but was finally contacted and called off. At 1210H, the 1/4 APC reported heavy 57-mm Recoilless Rifle (RR) fire and one M-113 was partially destroyed. The gunships engaged and eliminated a suspected enemy RR position; however, the battalion was still unable to push forward or maneuver.

At 1300H, a set of F-4 fighters arrived on station and hit the enemy with bombs, CBU, and 20-mm cannon. At 1345H, two F-100 fighters continued the attack with bombs and napalm. The 4/4 reinforced the 4/5 on the south at 1500H and threatened the enemy flank, but the VNA/VC met

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the 4/4 with heavy automatic weapons and small arms fire, halting their progress.

Gunships again engaged the enemy and enabled the 4/4 to move further east, but they again met stiff resistance, including 60-mm mortar and B-40 rocket fire. After two F-4 fighters hit the enemy with their load, the 4/4 resumed its push east. Another set of F-4s arrived at 1655H and drove a number of the NVA/VC from their positions with twenty-four 250-lb. bombs, and at 1730H two VNAF F-5s made the final airstrike of the day. As the last of the bombs exploded, all ARVN elements moved forward to engage the enemy, who was now fleeing from his positions.

In his analysis of the operation, the Senior Advisor, Col. Dean E. Hutter, observed: "Although initially slow in maneuvering under fire, the ground troops' confidence was quickly gained by the massive fire support from gunships and tactical air. Confidence was maintained throughout the operation and the ground units maneuvered well under fire after the air support arrived."^{30/}

On 23 February 1969, intelligence again indicated the enemy was moving a regimental-sized force into position to attack Quang Ngai City from the southwest. Elements of the 4th Regiment moved out on the morning of the 24th but were stopped at 0710H by heavy fire from a fortified hamlet along Route 516. Tactical airstrikes pounded the enemy all day but ARVN units were still unable to breach the enemy's defenses. As elements attempted to maneuver, they discovered the enemy was dug-in in

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heavily fortified hamlets from the outskirts of Quang Ngai to Nghia Hanh.

The battle raged for four days while artillery, gunships, and air-strikes bombarded the enemy-controlled hamlets. The heavy preponderance of firepower finally dislodged the enemy, and the ARVN elements began to sweep through the hamlets as the NVA/VC fled back to the mountains. The 140 USAF, 90 USMC, 16 VNAF, 8 Spooky, and 3 Air Force flareship sorties were flown in support of the battle. They were credited with 339 enemy KBA and 777 structures destroyed.

In his report, Senior Advisor, Col. Henry S. Sachers, observed the "enemy forces employed squad-size forces, dug in bunkered positions which were supported from other well prepared positions with both direct and indirect fire weapons. This small force proved to be almost impossible to dislodge." He concluded that "tactical air proved to be the best ^{31/} weapon to use against the fortified positions encountered."

Just ten days after this battle, intelligence reported that the 22d NVA Regiment had returned to the same area between Quang Ngai and Nghia Hanh. Although estimated losses of the last battle had reduced the regiment to 300-350 personnel, infiltrators had raised its effective strength back to approximately 1,300 troops.

Elements of the 2d ARVN Division, supported by three troops from the 11th Americal Brigade, moved to thwart an attack on the capital. Again they found the enemy entrenched in defensive networks of bunkers

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and trenches in the hamlets. Many of the bunkers were hidden in the walls of the houses.

Friendly tactics again consisted of massing artillery, gunship, and fighter firepower on the enemy positions before attempting an assault. The battle continued from 20 March to 1 April before the enemy was pushed back into the mountains. Sixty-four USAF and 14 VNAF fighter sorties supported the battle. ^{32/}

The enemy suffered one of its most devastating defeats from air-power at the Battle of the Triangle in January 1969. On 20 January, two Americal companies conducted combat assaults into four LZs and began pushing toward the village of Chau Nhai. Their mission was to locate 800 villagers kidnapped from a village eight kilometers to the north.

The LZs were cold; however, as the units moved toward Chau Nhai they became heavily engaged with an enemy force of undetermined size. Two more companies were airlifted into the action. By late afternoon, the commander decided to place a tight cordon around the village and illuminate the area all night.

The following morning, airstrikes and heavy artillery barrages hit the fortified enemy stronghold. Friendly units attempted to move into the village but met fierce resistance. Again, Air Force flareships illuminated the area throughout the night. All attempts to breach the cordon were successfully turned back. On 22 January the units tried

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to assault the village with the aid of APCs, but the enemy turned back the friendly forces with RPG rounds and mortar fire. Immediate airstrikes pounded the enemy, while all units moved back to the cordon. The ground commander requested 1,000 lb. and 2,000 lb. bombs with delayed fuzes for the next day.

Early on the morning of 23 January, Psychological Warfare aircraft had dropped Chieu Hoi leaflets and broadcast pleas to the enemy to surrender. After a suitable period of time, sortie after sortie of fighters bombarded the fortified bunkers and tunnel complexes with devastating results. As the smoke lifted, ground units with tracks moved into the village and completely swept the area, with no further resistance. The next three days were spent in digging through the ruins.

During the battle, fighters flew 51 airstrikes and dropped 648,000 pounds of bombs in addition to 2,000 rounds fired by the artillery. Forty-one NVA, 6 VC, and 21 weapons were all that could be excavated from the tons of displaced earth and collapsed tunnels. At least the major portion of the 9th Battalion, 22d Regiment, had been destroyed. ^{33/}

The record showed that almost without exception ground commanders called for air support whenever they met resistance from fortified enemy positions. Gunships and artillery could suppress the enemy's fire, but if he wanted to stay, it took airstrikes to drive him out, short of expending an unacceptable number of friendly lives in the effort.

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Impact of Close Air Support on Enemy

Gunships and artillery suppressed the enemy's fire, but close air support stopped him in his tracks and completely frustrated the attainment of the NVA/VC objectives. Although the enemy might temporarily occupy a position, he could not hold out under the relentless and overwhelming firepower of tactical air.

The threat of airstrikes forced the enemy to adopt tactics which severely restricted operations. He had to take extensive measures to conceal troop movement to the objective and prepare fortified positions all along the route. He had to pre-stock his supplies or restrict the operation to one supported by what each soldier could carry on his back. He had to attack in small groups under cover of darkness and plan to be gone before daylight, unless he were willing to sustain severe casualties.

Every time the enemy had massed his troops for an offensive, he was driven back after suffering great losses. In the battle outside Quang Ngai City in February 1969, estimates indicated the NVA/VC lost about 950 of approximately 1,300 troops massed for the attack. The last regimental-sized attack was in March and the last battalion-sized attack, in September 1969. As of March 1970, evidence indicated the enemy was unwilling to sustain such great losses and had adopted the tactic of limiting attacks to company and smaller units. Excessive casualties plus the loss of pre-stock caches had forced the NVA/VC

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to adopt the "Von Tap" tactic described earlier.

These factors seriously limited effectiveness of enemy attacks. They contributed greatly to the increased protection provided the government populated areas and limited friendly losses to acceptable proportions in providing that security. ^{34/}

Summary

Air support played a vital function in the overall strategy for defense of Quang Ngai Province against NVA/VC attacks. While artillery and gunships were able to suppress enemy fire, only the heavy ordnance delivered by fighter aircraft could blow away the heavy foliage, destroy the bunkers, decimate the trenchlines, and drive the enemy from heavily fortified positions. Ground commanders depended upon the responsive, accurate, concentrated firepower of tactical air every time they encountered stiff resistance from fortified enemy positions. Without exception, they were lavish in their praise of the support rendered by FAC and fighter pilots. Many soldiers could recall at least one battle when the timely arrival of airstrikes had saved their unit from being overrun and possibly annihilated.

The limited BDA available was, by itself, a poor measurement of effectiveness. However, when combined with intelligence sources, the results of many small losses were seen to have affected every phase of enemy activity. The total impact was a cumulative effect derived from the interdiction campaign in Laos, preplanned airstrikes in-country, and

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Fire Support Base
FIGURE 18

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close air support. The combined results of these airstrikes kept the enemy continually off balance and severely disrupted and restricted the NVA/VC offensive capability.

FOOTNOTES

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27. (C) Interview, Capt Charles E. Wilhelm, Senior Advisor, 4/5 2d ARVN Div, 6 Jan 70.
28. (C) Interview, 2d Lt Gerl E. Freeland, Ranger Platoon Leader, G Co, 75th Inf, Americal Div, 13 Jan 70.
29. (C) Interview, 1st Lt Daniel S. Burks, Executive Off, Ba To SF Camp, 16 Jan 70.
30. (C) Combat Operations After Action Rprt, 4th Reg, 2d ARVN Div, Col Dean E. Hutter, Sr Advisor, Operation QUYET THANG 244, 23 May 68.
31. (C) Combat Operations After Action Rprt, Advisory Team #2, MACV, Col Henry S. Sachers, Sr Advisor, Operation QUYET THANG 22, 10 Apr 69.
32. (C) Combat Operations After Action Rprt, Advisory Team #2, MACV, Col Henry S. Sachers, Sr Advisor, Operation QUYET THANG 25, 30 Apr 69.
33. (C) Operational Rprt, 11th Inf Bde, Col John W. Donaldson, Operation VERNON LAKE II, 31 Jan 69.
34. (C) PW Intelligence.

APPENDIX I
INFILTRATION ROUTES IN THE 12TH DIVISION TACTICAL AREA

The NVA/VC transportation system in the 12th Division Tactical Area (DTA) was connected with the Ho Chi Minh Trail by Highway 966, which entered South Vietnam on the Quang Tin/Laotian Border in the vicinity of Base Area 614. From Base Area 614, Highway 966 ran southeast to join Highway 14, in extreme southwestern Quang Tin Province. Supplies brought over this route were moved up Highway 14 to Kham Duc, a former U.S. Special Forces Camp that was overrun in May 1968. Kham Duc served as a rear services base for the 2d NVA Division, and was a major transshipment point where supplies from Laos were broken down to be shipped north into Quang Nam, east into northern Quang Tin, or southeast into Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces.

Highway 534 ran east from Kham Duc to the Que Son valley astride the Quang Tin/Quang Nam Border. A series of routes filtered southeast from Highway 534, feeding into the main river and trail system which passed from northwest to southeast through the western mountains. The K-7 Base Area, southeast of Highway 534, was a major storage area for supplies waiting to be moved down the logistical network. The area was characterized by numerous base-associated trails, which showed moderate to heavy use in late 1969.

The first major transshipment point on the central corridor was at Tra My (old Hau Duc), where the supplies were broken down for shipment

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east into southern Quang Tin, southwest into Kontum, or further south to Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh Provinces. After passing through the Tra My transshipment point, the corridor ran south and southeast, generally along the Nuoc Ong River, to the Dak Drinh River.

The confluence of the Dak Drinh, the Nuoc Ong, the Song Re, and the Dak Selo Rivers was the second major transshipment point on the corridor and was referred to as Gi Lang. At Gi Lang was believed to be the headquarters of both an NVA boat Transportation Group as well as a provincial sampan transportation unit. Also, the area between the Dak Drinh and Dak Selo Rivers, to the southwest of Gi Lang, was believed to be extensively used for temporary storage of supplies. As in the K-7 Area, in early 1970 this area showed extensive base-associated trail activity and numerous new structures and fortified positions had been observed in recent months.

From the Gi Lang transshipment point, supplies moved southwest along the Dak Drinh into Kontum, south along the Dak Selo into Kontum and southwestern Quang Ngai, east along the Song Tra Khuc into central Quang Ngai, and south along the Song Re to southern Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh Provinces. A minor transshipment point, O Chai, was located two-thirds of the way down the Song Re Valley. Here the corridor branched to the east, to bypass the Gia Vuc and Ba To Special Forces Camps. Although there were several trails that led south across the valley between the two camps, the main route passed to the north and east of Ba To, then south into

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the northern An Lao Valley.

In Quang Ngai, two major east-west comm-liaison routes connected the central corridor to the coastal plain. In the north, a trail system running from Mang Xim to Tan An served Base Area 120 and the northern portion of the Quang Ngai coastal plain. In the south, an extension of the corridor leading east from O Chai served the upper Song Ve Valley and terminated in the Nui Lon area. This system was used to move supplies for elements operating in the southern portion of the coastal plain. In addition to these routes, the Tra Khuc River and the Song Ve provided water transportation corridors over which supplies were moved to the coastal plain. However, due to air interdiction and destruction of sampan assets in 1969, the use of these river routes had declined sharply. For example, a recent Hoi Chanh, from a provincial level boat transportation group operating on the Song Ve River, stated that his unit's sampan resources had been reduced to only one boat, which was in a stationary position for use as a ferry.

TRANSPORTATION UNITS IN THE 12TH DTA

Movement of goods and equipment along the logistical system was the responsibility of the rear services section of Military Region 5. To accomplish these tasks, Military Region 5 created the Corridor Department. Subordinate to the Corridor Department were several transportation regiments. A typical transportation regiment was composed of several battalions used

[REDACTED]

for food production, boat, bicycle, and foot transportation. Also, it was believed that each of the regiments had a postal transportation battalion responsible for the flow of messages and administrative paperwork throughout the regimental AO and for the maintenance of a series of stations along the route, where this message traffic was broken down and distributed.

Two transportation regiments operated within the 12th DTA: the 230th Regiment, with five subordinate battalions (of which three operated in Quang Tin and two in Quang Nam Provinces), and the 240th Transportation Regiment, with eight subordinate battalions (five of which were believed to be operating in Quang Ngai, one in Binh Dinh, one in Kontum Province, and a postal transportation battalion which worked the entire AO.)

In Quang Ngai Province, in early 1970, the following elements of the 240th Regiment were believed to be operating: 241st Battalion worked the central corridor from the Tra My transshipment point, the 244th Battalion the east-west route from Mang Xim to Tan An, the 245th Battalion the east-west route from O Chai to Nui Lon, the 246th Battalion the northern An Lao Valley in Binh Dinh, and the 248th served as the postal communications battalion for the entire area.

The food production battalions of the regiments maintained an extensive and rapidly growing network of small agricultural production

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areas in the western portions of both provinces. The number of these areas had increased significantly in the past ten months, and captured documents indicated that Military Region 5 had ordered the expansion of agricultural production in the back country, in an effort to permit the NVA combat units to be independent of the coastal plain.

In early 1970, these production areas had only been able to meet the needs of the transportation units themselves, and the infiltration and labor groups passing along the corridor. The production areas were generally worked by labor groups, either recruited locally or composed of captured cadre, RF/PF, and ARVN who were interned in the mountains. They were supervised by members of the production battalion.

In addition to agricultural production, the rear services section of Military Region 5 maintained numerous clothing repair and manufacturing shops, blacksmith shops, munitions shops (for homemade explosive devices), ordnance shops, sampan factories, bicycle repair shops, etc., in the mountainous area.

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GLOSSARY

ALO	Air Liaison Officer
AO	Area of Operations
APC	Armored Personnel Carrier
APD	Airborne Personnel Detector
ARVN	Army of Republic of Vietnam
BDA	Bomb Damage Assessment
Bn	Battalion
CA	Combat Assault
CAP	Combined Action Program
CAS	Close Air Support
CBU	Cluster Bomb Unit
CG	Commanding General
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
DASC	Direct Air Support Center
DTA	Division Tactical Area
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FAO	Forward Air Observer
FDCC	Fire Direct Control Center
FWAF	Free World Air Force
KBA	Killed by Air
KEL	Known Enemy Location
KIA	Killed in Action
LRRP	Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol
LZ	Landing Zone
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
Medevac	Medical Evacuation
mm	millimeter
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
NVN	North Vietnam; North Vietnamese
OB	Order of Battle
PF	Popular Force
PSDF	Peoples Self Defense Forces
PW	Prisoner of War

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RD	Revolutionary Development
RDP	Revolutionary Development Program
Recon	Reconnaissance
RF	Regional Force
ROK	Republic of Korea
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
RR	Recoilless Rifle
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SEL	Suspected Enemy Location
SF	Special Forces
SLAM	Search-Locate-Annihilate-Monitor
SPAR	Special Agent Report
TACC	Tactical Air Control Center
TACP	Tactical Air Control Party
TADC	Tactical Air Direction Center
TAOR	Tactical Area of Responsibility
TASE	Tactical Air Support Element
TCA	Traffic Control Area
TCP	Traffic Control Point
TOC	Tactical Operations Center
TOT	Time Over Target
VC	Viet Cong
VCI	Viet Cong Infrastructure
VNAF	Vietnamese Air Force
VNMC	Vietnamese Marine Corps